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Trauma and the Rhetoric of Horror Films: The Rise of Torture Porn in a Post Nine-Eleven World

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Trauma and the Rhetoric of Horror Films: The Rise of Torture Porn in a Post Nine-Eleven World

by

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Dedication

To my family, for always being there.

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Trauma and the Rhetoric of Horror Films: The Rise of Torture Porn in a Post Nine-Eleven World

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The events of September 11, 2001 fundamentally changed the world for many in the United States. It was shocking and horrifying – it was, in a word, traumatic. This trauma took on a new dimension with the release of the horrifying Abu Ghraib "torture photographs" in 2004. Large-scale traumatic events such as September 11 and the Abu Ghraib revelations can impact not only the individual and his or her personal identity, but entire social bodies and its corresponding national identity as well. This study investigates how the American social body psychically dealt with the horror of these national traumas and socially negotiated what it means to "be an American." Specifically, it examines a disparate group of rhetorical artifacts, from articles in mainstream news reports to popular horror films, and looks for emergent patterns to provide insight into the larger whole.

This study draws on a variety of theoretical perspectives and employs a method of close reading and frame genre analysis to organize and understand the complex interplay of forces tuned toward a deeper understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of horror in

times of social upheaval. It focuses first on the mainstream news organizations reporting of both September 11 and Abu Ghraib to outline the master narrative and counter-narrative that emerged. It then analyzes three sets of films in the popular culture to better understand how the nation attempted to rhetorically constitute an "American Subject" in the wake of a horrifying trauma. The study concludes with an analysis of the different psychical subject positions that may be taken in the rhetorical negotiation of the American Subject and offers an explanation of the rhetorical function of the torture porn horror genre in this time of national trauma.

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Prologue: Finding Evil in Nana's Closet

> Like the rides in the amusement park which mimic violent death, the tale of horror is a chance to examine what's going on behind doors which we usually keep double-locked.
>
> – Stephen King, "The Last Waltz"[1]

If you ever meet my mother (and I encourage you to do so as she's a delightful woman), she will inevitably tell you her favorite story about me as a child. From her telling, she and my grandmother took me to J. C. Penny's to get my picture taken. In a surly mood, I informed them, "you can take my picture, but you can't make me smile." Rather than focus on her defiant child, my proud mother chooses to see this as a sign of blessed intelligence. "He was not even two," she will proudly exclaim. "Not even two and he was already able to put together that he couldn't stop us from taking his picture, but he could make sure it wasn't a good one." While I don't have a recollection of this particular exchange, I have no reason to doubt her and there is photographic evidence of a two-year-old Sean glaring at the camera.

There are two other stories, however, which constitute my earliest memories of childhood and inform my mother's favorite tale to tell. The first occurred a week or so prior to my third birthday.[2] My family was visiting my grandmother at her home in California and I was intent on finding someone to play a game with me. I went into the bedroom closet where the board games were kept and was overwhelmed by the smell of mothballs, a smell that I still associate with this closet. Unfortunately for me, the game I really wanted was on a shelf I couldn't quite reach, so I stepped into the closet to see if there was a way I might climb up to retrieve it. I looked to my right and there was

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[1] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Berkley Books, 1981), 394.

[2] Although I can't be exactly sure of the chronology to all of my earliest memories, researchers generally agree that people's first memories are usually between the ages of two to four, so these recollections are certainly among my first. See Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 125-130.

nothing. I looked straight ahead and, again, nothing would help me upwards. I looked to my left and found myself staring into the face of evil. There was the boogeyman, eyes blazing with anger, lips curled back over his teeth in a menacing snarl, his green fist raised and poised to bring down the wrath of the underworld on my poor, fragile body. I bolted backwards out of the closet, bounced off the bed, and hit the floor. I didn't scream and I didn't cry. I realized then that this wasn't a boo-boo for which yelps would bring my mommy's kisses to make it better. My very soul had been ripped in two – this was my first true encounter with terror.

I don't know how long I sat on the floor; my memory tells me it was hours, but it was most likely just moments. My mother, ostensibly hearing my fall, came into the room and asked me what happened. I vividly remember the mixture of fear and frustration that boiled inside me as I tried to explain to her that Nana's closet was a gateway to the hellish netherworld, but I didn't have the words. My description of the event was limited to repeating the words "green" and "monster" while pointing at the closet. Ultimately, it was my father that had the explanation. The bedroom closet was where he was hiding the presents for my upcoming birthday, and these happened to include a four-foot tall (larger than life-sized to a three-year-old) coloring book of the Incredible Hulk. He pulled the book out of the closet and showed it to me, hoping to prove there was no boogeyman in the closet. Instead, he showed me there was. After showing me the coloring book, my father asked me if I had gone into the closet to look for my hidden presents. I told him that I hadn't and he said he believed me, but the look on his face suggested otherwise. The thing was, I had never even considered looking for hidden presents to be an option, much less lying about it. At this point in my life, such deception was a concept I couldn't have come up with on my own, and it was this incident that introduced me to lying and deceit, however unintentional it had been. In

this way, two feelings were mixed: in that closet, I found not only terror, but the potential for evil in humanity.

The second story involves a trip I took with my mother and grandmother. I can't say definitively that it was the infamous J. C. Penny's trip, but I have a vague feeling that it was, and it would explain my bratty behavior. Having just learned of evil and deception a few weeks earlier, I decided to give it a try. I never liked the backseat of my grandmother's car and especially hated the seatbelt that prevented me from squirming, as any good two-year-old will do.[3] On this trip, I scrambled into the front bench seats of Nana's Buick and told my mom that I wanted to sit up front. My mother protested, but my grandmother said, "Let him sit in the front. He thinks there isn't a seatbelt in the middle, but there is." It is difficult to describe the rage that welled up within me at that moment. I remember insisting the lack of a restraint wasn't why I wanted to sit up front, even though that was exactly the reason. My little hands shook with anger as I worked to try to buckle the seatbelt. I wasn't so much upset that I had to wear a seatbelt as much as I was furious that my grandmother had crawled inside my head and uncovered my ingeniously deceptive plan. Well, screw you, Nana. You can take my picture, but you can't make me smile. I would have my revenge by ruining their precious pictorial moment.

Although I have other memories from around this time, none are as vivid or complete in detail as these two, which speaks to the power of fear and anger, of horror and vengeance.[4] These feelings of fear, anger and vengeance are primal and childish, revealing one of the deepest affects that humans share; exposure to them in childhood,

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[3] This was before the days of mandatory car seats, which has been squelching all attempts at squirming for decades now.

[4] It probably also speaks to how narrative and memory shape our personal perceptions as Nana and I tell this story quite differently.

then, may recommend a psychoanalytic perspective. Through this project, I hope to better understand horror and its impact, socially, politically, and philosophically.

A guiding story for psychoanalytic theorist and critic Julia Kristeva, as she contemplates horror, is Sigmund Freud's tale of Little Hans, a precocious little boy whose fear of horses reveals to Kristeva what abjection is truly about.[5] My guiding story is the Incredible Hulk. Since that fateful day when I discovered my grandmother's closet was the entrance to Hell, I have been fascinated by the connections between fear, horror, and aggression. Just as Little Hans' fear of being bitten by a horse is really his fear that he might bite, the greatest fear of the Incredible Hulk is his inability to control his anger and aggression. In one of the more famous lines from the 1970s television series, *The Incredible Hulk*, David Banner says, "Don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."[6] And don't even think about trying to take the Hulk's picture.

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[5] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[6] *The Incredible Hulk - Pilot*, DVD, directed by Kenneth Johnson (1977; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006). In the comic book, the character's name is Bruce Banner, but is David Bruce Banner in the television series.

Introduction: A Rhetoric of Identity and Horror

If one were to spend a good portion of the day consuming U.S. news media, it would seem that the American public lives their lives in constant fear. At the time of this writing, television tells us the economy is getting worse while the radio warns of another impending terrorist attack. Newspaper journalists make us think crime is on the rise and the blogosphere is filled with stories ranging from how hot dogs will kill you to imminent death from an asteroid collision.[7] The accuracy of these claims is secondary to their affective impact – in contemporary American society, such mediated stories define the world for us and spread our emotions through the social body like a disease; as one journalist noted, "fear is the most contagious emotion there is."[8]

Fear has been theorized across multiple academic disciplines for decades, from neuroscience to the social sciences, cultural studies, and beyond. What is most striking is that even though these approaches differ greatly in their approach and understanding of fear, there is often substantial overlap in their theorizations. In psychoanalysis, for example, Sigmund Freud explained fear in respect to what he termed the "pleasure principle": our emotional state is an economic one in which "the whole of psychical activity is aimed at avoiding unpleaure and procuring pleasure."[9] Although many of

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[7] Barry Glassner, "Narrative Techniques of Fear Mongering," *Social Research* 71 (2004): 819-826. EBSCOhost (15868567). The examples here are not from Glassner's essay, but they are representative of the types of fears Glassner details.

[8] Taylor Helen Kirwan, "No Fear," *Evening Standard*, February 6, 2009, Features section, Final edition, 15. EBSCOhost (36417553).

[9] Jean LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 322. For Freud, there is a difference between fear and fright. Fear requires an object to fear while fright contains a factor of surprise. For Freud, fright is what causes trauma because a subject encounters danger without being prepared for it. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 6-7. This project examines what occurs when the traumatic fright becomes fear, attaches itself to an object, and becomes deployed rhetorically as horror.

Freud's conclusions about the human psyche have been heavily criticized, scholars continue to come to similar conclusions about fear and the avoidance of non-pleasure. For example, psychologists Dianne Tice and Ellen Bratslavsky found that most people "focu[s] on feeling better now" even "at the expense of one's long-term goals."[10] And some philosophers of human emotion and affect agree. Susanne Langer contends that,

> [t]he driving force in human minds is fear, which begets an imperious demand for security in the world's confusion: a demand for a world-picture that fills all experience and gives each individual a definite *orientation* amid the terrifying forces of nature and society.[11]

What is most striking about Langer's comment is that she foregrounds the human desire toward an understanding of the world and the ability to orient one's self to the frightening elements of our daily lives. Similarly, legendary horror author and literary critic H. P. Lovecraft concluded that, "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind [sic] is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."[12]

One intersection of these different disciplinary assumptions is that fear is, in some sense, an aversion to not understanding, of not being able to articulate "that which frightens" – and "that which frightens" is dependent upon the culture from which it emerges. Humans understand their world through the stories they tell, but these stories are constructed within a cultural infrastructure that influences how one perceives the way the world operates.[13] Owing to the cultural specificity of fear, it would seem impossible

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[10] Dianne M. Tice and Ellen Bratslavsky, "Giving in to Feel Good: The Place of Emotion Regulation in the Context of General Self-Control," *Psychological Inquiry* 11 (2000): 157. EBSCOhost (4715363).

[11] Susan Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 158. *Emphasis in original*.

[12] H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (Paris: Feedbooks, 1938), 3.

[13] The claim that humans understand their world through stories is one that is taken up in detail in Chapter 1. As a short primer, however, I will offer that this assumption of storytelling providing a structured understanding of the world has a rich history, from antiquity to the modern era. For Aristotle, story is "the first principle." Aristotle, *On Poetics*, trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 22. Former head of Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Entertainment, Peter Guber argues that the whole of human experience revolves around our ability and desire to share stories.

to attempt to understand an individual separate from his or her cultural influences. As Sheldon Soloman, Jeff Greenberg and Tom Pyszcynski note,

> Only human beings exist ensconced in a humanly constructed symbolic conception of reality that is subjectively experienced as an absolute representation of reality by the average enculturated individual. Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of the human estate requires the explicit recognition that we are *cultural animals* and consequent efforts to define what culture is, how it is acquired and maintained, what psychological function it serves, and how it does so.[14]

A person's subjectivity is, at least partially, defined through a social relationship with others, and larger cultural stories or "master narratives," in turn, influence that social relationship. Fear itself is a biological response, but we are conditioned by our cultural experience as to how we interpret that response.

To better understand fear as something meaningful, one must reckon with the dominant master narratives of a given culture. Distinct from a contextualized personal narrative, a "master narrative is *a transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture*."[15] Personal fantasies rooted in our individual experiences structure our understanding of ourselves, but master narratives structure our understanding of the world. The interaction between individual fantasy and transhistorical, cultural narratives structures how we see ourselves as agentive actors in the world. If more and more people

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He writes, "Built into your DNA is humanity's ten-thousand-plus years of telling and listening to oral stories. This veneration of story is a force so powerful and enduring that it has shaped cultures, religions, whole civilizations." Peter Guber, *Tell to Win: Connect, Persuade, and Triumph with the Hidden Power of Story* (London: Profile Books, 2011), 1.

[14] Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, "The Cultural Animal: Twenty Years of Terror Management Theory and Research," in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, eds. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, and Tom Pyszczynski (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 16. *Emphasis in original*.

[15] Jeffry R. Halverson, Jr. Goodall, H. L., and Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14. *Emphasis in original*. Similarly, Gabriel Acevedo, James Ordner, and Miriam Thompson explain master narratives as an "all-encompassing and authoritative account of some aspect of social reality that is widely accepted and endorsed by the larger society." Gabriel A. Acevedo, James Ordner, and Miriam Thompson, "Narrative Inversion as a Tactical Framing Device: The Ideological Origins of the Nation of Islam," *Narrative Inquiry* 20 (2010): 125. EBSCOhost (54357161).

begin to perceive their agentive place in the world similarly, the interaction between fantasy and master narrative can harden into a rhetorical nodal point, otherwise known as an ideology, which may act as a repository "of culture and reflect a group's experiences and deepest beliefs about the social, physical, and spiritual worlds."[16] Simply put, I begin this study with the assumption that the interactions between fantasy and master narratives suggest that the social body – by which I mean a shared collective self-image – is constituted rhetorically. The foregrounding of rhetoric in this project shapes how I approach the study of fear. For me, *fear* is the biological response to a frightening situation and *horror* is the rhetorical explanation of (or failure to explain) that situation. Hence, the focus of this study is the rhetorical creation and management of fear, which I term, simply, "horror." Before I discuss the concepts of fear and horror more thoroughly, however, I want to explain what led me to take them up.

The thesis of this project is that horror played an important role in the rhetorical efforts of the American social body to reconcile the traumas of Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib. From this, three research questions guide my research:

RQ 1: How does horror impact our personal and national identity in times of cultural upheaval?

RQ 2: What role does horror play in the construction and (re)negotiation of master narratives and counter-narratives?

RQ 3: What role does horror in popular culture, specifically the horror film, play in respect to trauma and identity?

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[16] Michael J. Murphy, "The Wizard of Oz as Cultural Narrative and Conceptual Model for Psychotherapy," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 33 (1996): 531. EBSCOhost (pst-33-4-531). Murphy refers to this hardening as myth; I hesitate to share his vocabulary because of the very specific way Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, rhetoricians whose work has a considerable impact on this project, understand "myth." I believe that referencing this concept as a "nodal point," however, is consistent with Murphy's argument.

In a move towards answering these questions, this project focuses on the interactions between the master narrative and counter-narrative concerning the attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001 and the 2004 Abu Ghraib scandal as each played out in the discourse of the government, mainstream news outlets (MNO), and popular film.[17] Collectively, I refer to the discourse surrounding the attacks in September 2001 as the "Nine-Eleven" master narrative, and the revelation of U.S. sponsored torture in Iraq as the "Abu Ghraib" counter-narrative to emphasize my focus on their constructedness. To be clear, this project does not seek to provide an account of the American social body as a discernible essence, but will, instead, examine the rhetorical representations of that body -- this national, collective self-image – in an attempt to rhetorically constitute the American Subject.

THE SOCIAL BODY AND AMERICAN SUBJECT

The association of people with a common cultural experience is what I refer to as a *social body*. If borders and a culturally accepted system of state leadership also group that social body, then it may additionally have a *national identity*, which is rhetorically negotiated to constitute the *[National] Subject*.[18] Although I have no hesitation in

[17] For this project, government discourse comes from news conferences, interviews, and press releases from official government agencies and/or representatives. MNOs comprise a subset of a larger media conglomerate that includes television, magazines, newspapers, and internet sites that follow a traditional form of news journalism. This includes editorials and opinion pieces, but does not extend to the more fringe elements of mediated news coverage such as conspiracy theories (e.g. that Nine-Eleven was orchestrated by the United States government). In terms of films, this project will examine three groups of films: Nine-Eleven films (Hollywood studio dramatizations that tell the personal stories of those directly impacted by the September 11 attacks), Testimonial Films (documentaries that allow the people involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal to tell their story – provide their personal testimony), and torture porn (the horror cycle focused on torture as the frightening element to the films). The labels "Nine-Eleven films" and "Testimonial films" are mine and contextualized to this project for conceptual clarity. Each of these film groupings will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

[18] To better understand the difference between a social body, national identity, and the [National] Subject, let me offer an example. On a given Saturday in September, Texas Royal Memorial Stadium might fill with 90,000+ Longhorn fans, all of who have shared a similar cultural experience as fans of the University of Texas football team and constitute themselves as a social body even though thousands of them do not

claiming such a social body exists, it is impossible for me to claim to "know" that social body in its totality, which is to say that although a person or group may materially exist, the interaction that constitutes them as a social body only discursively exists such that it can only be partially examined. I take my cue from Michel Foucault, who argued that discourse "is so complex a reality" that to theorize about its interactions requires special attention to "discursive practice."[19] One way that scholars might be able to interrogate something discursive like the "social body" would be to consider it as a rhetorical construction. Such constructions concern the central questions that have been tackled by rhetoricians for decades. For example, in the mid 1970s, Michael McGee argued that terms such as "the people" were so politically empty that the "only concrete significance is their existence, for not even their *identity* is agreed upon by those who appeal to

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share the same country of citizenship. This is different from a self-imagined public, like Canadians, who not only share a similar cultural experience, but also a national identity, because their citizenship groups them by a border and accepted state leader(s). This cultural experience and citizenship are rhetorically deployed to determine what it means to *be a Canadian* and constitutes the Canadian Subject. This [National] Subject, however, is continually (re)negotiated through the discourse. For example, in the context of the Canadian social body, the majority of people living in Quebec understand themselves not just as a "Canadian," but also as a "Quebecer," and issues of import to them include questions of language and self-determination in Quebec. In this case, even though there is a *national identity* to the *social body*, the notion of the *Canadian Subject* is a matter of rhetorical negotiation that could be understood very differently by an English-speaking resident of Ottawa than by a French-speaking Quebecer in Montreal. For evidence of the cultural differences in understanding one's "Canadian-ness" see Antonia Maioni, "PM is Reaching Out to Quebecers in a Manner the Chretien Liberals Never Did," *Toronot Star*, November 26, 2006. EBSCOhost (03190781). For a rhetorical perspective of the cultural differences between the Anglophones and Francophones in Canada in general and Quebec specifically, see Evelyne Bougie et al., "The Cultural Narratives of Francophone and Anglophone Quebecers: Using a Historical Perspective to Explore the Relationships Among Collective Relative Deprivation, In-Group Entitativity, and Collective Esteem," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50 (2011). EBSCOhost (2011372497). In light of this, I would argue that there is a Canadian social body, but the negotiation of the Canadian Subject exists in relation to an issue or issues – be they Quebec self-determination, Canadian federalism, the survival of French as the primary language in Quebec, etc. In the context of this project specifically, the American social body negotiates what it means to be the American Subject in relation to a (re)negotiation of an understanding of our national identity in relation to the Nine-Eleven master narrative and Abu Ghraib counter-narrative, which is more fully discussed later in this section.

[19] Michel Foucault, *Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1966), xv.

them."[20] If we accept the contention that the meaningful world is discursively formulated, then rhetorical studies is uniquely situated to comment on questions of group identity. From a rhetorical perspective, the meaningful world is a discursive formation and the subject (as a self-conscious identity) is called into being by rhetoric.

The contention that rhetoric can call a subject into being has many names in rhetorical studies. Kenneth Burke calls it "identification" and argues that rhetoric is "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents."[21] To meet these goals, Burke contends, the rhetor must satisfy two criteria: s/he must have an audience to address, and then create identification with – and thereby bring into existence – that audience. Similarly, to constitute an object of address (e.g. an audience) is to bring a certain conception of the self into being. It is the interaction between those two criteria that gives rhetoric its constitutive power because the subject moved to act cannot exist prior to the use of rhetoric. For Burke, a subject is not persuaded, but rhetorical identification creates a subject who wishes to act.[22]

Another theory regarding the constitutive power of rhetoric, Edwin Black's second persona, questions Burke's seeming assumption that an audience could even exist prior to rhetoric. For Black, there is no audience before rhetoric; the rhetorical act literally brings the audience into being and structures their identity as audience when "actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending to for cues that tell them how they are to view the world. … The quest for identity is the modern pilgrimage."[23] Chaïm

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[20] Michael C. McGee, "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 238. EBSCOhost (9304744). *Emphasis in original*.

[21] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 41.

[22] For Diane Davis, Burke's understanding of identification has its roots in Freud's work with suggestion and primary identification. See Diane Davis, "Identification: Burke and Freud on Who You Are," *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38 (2008). EBSCOhost (31657009).

[23] Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, eds. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudill (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 334.

Perelman makes similar observations in his theorizing of audience in argumentation. For Perelman, not everybody who encounters an argument should be considered part of its audience.[24] As an example, he contends that some political arguments are not directed at opponents who are intractable and, as such, the rhetor makes a conscious decision that this person is not part of the audience even though s/he may be privy to the discourse. As with Black's second persona, it is the rhetoric that literally calls the subjects into being and constitutes them as an audience.[25]

More recently, a number of contemporary rhetoricians (although fundamentally agreeing with the constitutive power of rhetoric) worry about the temporal assumptions inherent in theories like Black's second persona. Taking the lead from Louis Althusser, whose theory of interpellation had a parallel understanding of subject formation, scholars like Maurice Charland have argued for a constitutive rhetoric where the subject is always-already called into being by rhetorical formations.[26] For Charland, a subject is always-already marked by rhetoric, but new rhetorical situations allow for shifting subjectivity. He contends, "the development of new subject positions, of new constitutive rhetorics, is possible at particular historical moments. The subject is a position within a text. To be an embodied subject is to experience and act in a textualized world."[27] This conception of constitutive rhetoric comports with research on narrative

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[24] Although Perelman is speaking specifically about argumentation, the extension of his reasoning to all discursive utterances makes sense.

[25] For a more detailed discussion of Perelman's analysis of rhetoric and audience, see Chaïm Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 9-20.

[26] The phrase "always-already" was made famous by Althusser when he theorized how the subject was formed in relation to ideology. For him, ideology called the subject into being through the "hail" of interpellation. His problem, however, was how to reconcile the ubiquity of ideology and a subject prior to interpellation; his solution was to theorize the subject as always-already marked by ideology. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthy Review Press, 1971).

[27] Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Pueple Quebecois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 141-142.

that found that people not only tell stories, but the stories begin to tell themselves through people.[28] In discussing narratives, Charland concludes that "narratives 'make real' coherent subjects. They constitute subjects as the present a particular textual position."[29] For him, the world is realized as a series of texts and both personal and master narratives are examples of those texts.

Just as our position as a subject can be rhetorically called into being, so can aspects of our identity that are used to organize and identify groups. Rather than seeing groups like the social body as static and unchanging, we should instead view them as continually in "the process of becoming: … not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become."[30] This is to say that group identity formations, like national or cultural identities, are the result of a constant rhetorical negotiation. As Humberto Dos Santos Martins explains, "cultural and national identities cannot be assessed through static and definitive notions of culture and the nation-state. Identities are constructed in process over time and space, according to particular experiences and encounters that each individual participates in."[31] Further, our understanding of what constitutes social bodies like "the American people" will continually evolve as our life experiences change and as events in the world reconfigure how a social body is perceived.[32] For Michael Lane Bruner, questions of national identity are a constant struggle between rhetors who seek to define the group – questions of who is included,

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[28] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 138.

[29] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 138-139.

[30] Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

[31] Humberto Dos Santos Martins, "Living Between Nation-States and Nature: Anthropological Notes on National Identities," *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries* 74 (2011): 164. EBSCOHost.

[32] For an excellent description of how age impacts how we understand national and cultural identity, see Martyn Barrett, "The Development of National Identity in Childhood and Adolescence" (paper presented at the University of Surrey, March 22, 2000).

who is excluded, what are shared values, and what does it mean to be part of the social body. He writes,

> national identity is incessantly negotiated through discourse. What the nation is at any given moment for any given individual depends on the narrative accounts and arguments they bring to bear on the subject. … There is, therefore, a never-ending and politically consequential rhetorical struggle over national identity.[33]

Although the approaches that I've briefly outlined offer different foci, together they provide evidence that "constitutive rhetoric" is the accepted norm for how humans come to understand themselves and their world.

In this project, I seek to illustrate how struggles over identity play themselves out in discourse, both publically and privately, in times of cultural upheaval. Focusing on identity struggles during times of social crisis, what I term *social trauma*, makes the rhetorical dynamics easier to see. The artifice of our perceived reality that rhetoric both makes and masks is never so apparent as when contradictions emerge, and they tend to do so during perceived crises. For theorist Ernest Becker, contradictions in general are an inherent part of the human condition because we are "half animal and half symbolic."[34] For him, the prevailing paradox is that, while language gives us the ability to imagine immortality, we are also condemned to exist in ever-decaying bodies, thus eternally cognizant of our inevitable demise. The result, Becker contends, is that the stories we use to explain our world are ones that attempt to reconcile this paradox by denying our mortality and where everything we do in the Symbolic realm "is an attempt to deny and

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[33] Michael Lane Bruner, *Strategies of Remembrance: The Rhetorical Dimensions of National Identity Construction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 1.

[34] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1973), 26. In this work, Becker diverges from a traditional Freudian understanding of the human condition and finds later psychoanalysts such as Otto Rank more helpful. The primary difference is that Becker believes that the knowledge of death is the driving factor for humanity as opposed to sexuality. That said, I believe Becker's work to be consistent with the psychoanalytic theory that this project employs, especially as it relates to both Freud and Lacan's theorizations of trauma.

overcome [this] grotesque fate."[35] For Becker, narratives designed to deny the inevitability of death are "the mainspring of human activity" where, through our stories, we hope "to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is [our] final destiny."[36] It is here that we begin to forge the conceptual connections between identity, rhetoric, and fear, which inform my understanding of horror as the rhetorical manifestation of fear.[37] From Becker's theorizations, social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski and Sheldon Solomon have spent the past several decades studying the impact of humans' mortality awareness and developing what they term "Terror Management Theory (TMT)."[38] For me, TMT has explanatory potential in understanding the power of constitutive rhetoric when keyed to affective fear and is a good starting point for the questions that guide this project.

TMT contends that in an attempt to combat the anxiety of death awareness, "people adhere to socially constructed worldviews in an attempt to imbue life with meaning and create the possibility that they may transcend their worldly death either literally, by being granted entrance into an eternal paradise, or symbolically, through societal remembrance" and the permanence of their culture and its values.[39] The texts of national identity that a culture internally negotiates work to soothe the anxiety of death by

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[35] Becker, *Denial of Death*, 27.

[36] Becker, *Denial of Death*, xvii.

[37] Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle forge similar connections around the symbol of the American flag. In their book, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*, they argue that, "the sacrificial system that binds American citizens has a sacred flag at its center. Patriotic rituals revere it as the embodiment of a bloodthirsty totem god who organizes killing energy. This totem god is the foundation of a mythic, religiously constructed American identity." Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

[38] There are literally dozens of published studies and articles by these scholars working together and with others regarding TMT. To read what many consider to be their foundational work, see Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon, "The Causes and Consequences of the Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory," in *Public Self and Private Self*, ed. Roy Baumeister (New York: Springer - Verlag, 1986).

[39] Matt Motyl, Zach Rothschild, and Tom Pyszczynski, "The Cycle of Violence and Pathways to Peace," *Journal of Organisational Transformation & Social Change* 6 (2009): 154. EBSCOhost (42967291).

ensuring that even though the individual may perish, his or her way of life lives on through time immortal. Thus, the "text" of a social body can be read as the cultural narratives it co-produces with an individual who chooses to defend that narrative in the face of fear and mortality.[40] According to Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszcynski, the individual who adheres to "internalized standards of values, norms, and social roles derived from the culture [can] qualify for death transcendence," and ease the anxiety that comes with the human awareness of mortality.[41] Although TMT explains how master narratives work to smooth the psychical functioning of the social body, it fails to explain what happens within the social body when those master narratives fail. This leaves us with a need for something that addresses rhetoric in a way TMT does not.

Some scholars contend that when the master narratives no longer provide the individual a framework to neutralize death anxiety, the social body divides into groups that compete for rhetorical supremacy. Richard Boland, Jr. and Ramkrishnan V. Tenkasi argue that all of our experiences are ultimately distilled into stories to be told. They write,

> We narrativize our experience almost continually as we recognize unusual or unexpected events (the noncanonical) and construct stories which make sense of them (restore canonicallity). … [The] narrative capability of humans is a fundamental cognitive process through which our cultural world and sense of self are constructed and maintained over time.[42]

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[40] Studies have consistently shown that an individual will most vigorously defend their cultural assumptions (which also relates to an increase in displays of patriotism and national identification) when s/he has been reminded of his or her mortality. From the perspective of constitutive rhetoric, this means that not only are these cultural narratives rhetorically "readable," their collapse is a textual failure and, therefore, a social trauma. For evidence that people defend their cultural narratives when reminded of their mortality, see Jamie Arndt et al., "Suppression, Accessibility of Death-Related Thoughts, and Cultural Worldview Defense: Exploring the Psychodynamics of Terror Management," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1997). EBSCOhost (psp-73-1-5).

[41] Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, "The Cultural Animal," 19.

[42] Richard J. Boland Jr and Ramkrishnan V. Tenkasi, "Perspective Making and Perspective Taking in Communities of Knowing," *Organization Science* 6 (1995): 353. EBSCOhost (4435377).

These narratives are grafted onto everything from the events that transpire in our daily lives to the news that we read to the media we choose to consume as entertainment. For many, such entertainment is not mindless escapism but an important way that individuals deal with the personal fear one may feel from encountering particular cultural stories. Brian Richardson, for example, contends that, "plots projected onto fictional characters are readily seen to be narrativized projections of our private fears and desires."[43] It is possible that through the stories that are consumed *en masse* (like the television and films of popular culture) rhetoricians might see the most profound reflections of change in the social body as the noncanonical is incorporated into the existing master narratives *or* as the noncanonical becomes the prevailing master narrative. Struggles over issues like national identity, in particular, can provide new texts from which the subject may emerge, serving "to overcome or define away the recalcitrance the world presents."[44] For these and related reasons, the focus of this project is drawn time and again back to the American Subject as constituted in relation to the Nine-Eleven master narrative, the trauma of Abu Ghraib, and the fear bound with them (i.e., the American Subject called into being by the horror of Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib).[45]

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[43] Brian Richardson, "Introduction: Plot and Emplotment," in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 69.
[44] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 142.
[45] This study is hardly the first time the American Subject has been conceived of as a rhetorical construction born from a traumatic narrative. For Renée L. Bergland, the American Subject is negotiated in relation to what was done to the Native Americans. She argues, the American social body "is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grave upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject." Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 22. Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* was written in the aftermath of Nine-Eleven, but before the Abu Ghraib scandal, making it an indispensible counterpoint to my thinking in this project. For Butler, the American Subject after Nine-Eleven is bound with the process of mourning and the potential for melancholia. She asks what lives "count" and become marked as "grievable" in their loss. For Butler, the American social body might be understood in relation to its loss and the differentiation with the facelessness of the constructed enemy. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (New York: Verso, 2004).

One of the ways in which the American Subject is negotiated is through the discourse consumed by the United States social body.[46] According to Bruce Kluger, "America has always been obsessed with its own dramas. Whether on TV or on the big screen, on front pages or in quickie books, we are a nation bent on relentlessly reliving our darkest moments."[47] Official government discourse is an obvious starting place to begin a discussion of how a nationalist construct such as the American Subject can be coordinated around an event. According to David Ardia, to connect with its citizenry, the "government must speak. And in order to remain relevant, government must speak through the same channels that its channels that its citizens do."[48] In the modern world, those channels include print, television, and the Internet. For Jessica Fisher, "access to information about government activities is vital to the health of a democratic society" and modern communication technology "has allowed for public access to *official* information about government activities on a scale unparalleled in history."[49] Further, the government discourse has an impact on how other coverage will evolve. Michael Salwen argues that looking at the official government discourse is important because it is the first driving factor in how an event will be framed to the public.[50]

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[46] As a definitional summary, the American social body is the generic terms for a collective self-imagining and the American Subject is a rhetorically negotiated constitution in relation to an understanding of the world. In this project, that understanding is in relation to the Nine-Eleven master narrative and Abu Ghraib torture scandal.

[47] Bruce Kluger, "The Lost Humanity of September 11," *USA Today*, August 9, 2006, News section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[48] David S. Ardia, "Government Speech and Online Forums: First Amendment Limitations on Moderating Public Discourse on Government Websites," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2010 (2010): 1982. EBSCOhost (60990958).

[49] Jessica Fisher, "An Improved Analytical Framework for the Official Acknowledgment Doctrine: A Broader Interpretation of "Through an Official and Documented Disclosure."," *New York Law School Law Review* 54 (2009): 305. EBSCOhost (47640955). *Emphasis in original*.

[50] Michael B. Salwen, "News of Hurricane Andrew: The Agenda of Sources and the Sources' Agendas," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (1995). EBSCOhost (EJ532124). Similarly, Richard S. Fitzpatrick has also argued that, "Washington is too vast for any reporter to cover by himself [sic], and the government is so complicated that accurate information cannot be obtained without the cooperation of each agency." Richard S. Fitzpatrick, *Congressional Digest* 30 (1951): 157. EBSCOhost (12334298).

MNO discourse is important because one of the ways Americans come to understand their national identity and cultural history is largely "written by journalists" and "the media are unique in their ability to reach huge communities simultaneously."[51] According to Benedict Anderson, newspapers – and I include those with an online presence as well – are particularly important in shaping our national identity because the reader is aware that s/he is one of millions who reads the same material and sees "exact replicas of his [sic] own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours [and] is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life."[52] In addition to the news features, it is also important to pay special attention to the opinion sections and letters to the editors.[53] For Elisabeth Le, these sections of the newspaper are no less significant than featured articles in the negotiation of national identity, and represent "significant manifestations" of "the manner in which problems defined, causes are diagnosed, moral judgments are made and remedies are suggested."[54] At the very least, opinion essays and letters to the editor give us a sense of how master narratives are negotiated, internalized, or rejected.

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[51] Jill A. Edy, "Journalistic Uses of Collective Memory," *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 71. EBSCOhost (2061661).

[52] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 36.

[53] One of the reasons that I turn to these sections is because they provide an opportunity inside of the MNO discourse for alternative visions to peak through occasionally. According to W. Lance Bennett, the American media consistently repeated the administration's message concerning Abu Ghraib as the dominant narrative and "declined to offer the public a coherent alternative frame." W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, "None Dare Call It Torture: Indexing and the Limits of Press Independence in the Abu Ghraib Scandal," *Journal of Communication* 56 (2006): 481. EBSCOhost (21745773). Differing rhetorical visions of the events at Abu Ghraib and the American Subject were forced to find alternative avenues to distribute their rhetorical message and most often turned to the opinion sections and letters to the editor in local newspapers.

[54] Elisabeth Le, "Collective Memories and Representations of National Identity in Editorials," *Journalism Studies* 7 (2006): 711. EBSCOhost (22172524).

In addition to the coverage provided by the government and MNOs, a negotiation of the American Subject also occurs in popular entertainment.[55] For example, the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs led many to remark on the similarities between the images in the pictures and the images in our entertainment.[56] According to Madelaine Hron, we "cannot help but compare these images to the torture we may see in films and on TV. … [The] public spectacle of torture has not disappeared; it has simply moved from the town square to our living room."[57] Further, for David MacDougall, the contestation of issues such as national identity is representative of a larger cultural debate that is often understood through immersive cultural narratives like film. He contends that,

> like ritual, the focal narratives of history provide a medium for political contestation and change. Social memory, although it may be powerfully shaped by film and television, is clearly as vulnerable to revision as the traditions of earlier times. … Yet a residue of a clearly *physical* nature remains in film images[,] which is not available in verbal narratives, and its importance should not be underestimated.[58]

The power of narrative film is that it allows a rhetorical vision to be experienced and shared socially, which helps it coalesce into a collective memory for the social body.[59] As Roxana Waterson explains, "Memories cannot become social until they are articulated, in whatever medium, and thus become available to be shared."[60] Further, for

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[55] An argument can be made that the current news cycle can easily be classified as "entertainment" in American popular culture. For the purposes of this study, however, I make a distinction between news media and entertainment, which I consider to be primarily fictional film and television programs.

[56] This event will be described in more detail later, but it would be helpful to provide a short description here. In May of 2004, Seymour Hersch of *The New Yorker* published photographs depicting United States soldiers torturing prisoners in the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib. These pictures were the first bit of tangible evidence that the United States was engaging in torture of "enemy combatants" in the War on Terror.

[57] Madelaine Hron, "Torture Goes Pop!," *Peace Review* 20 (2008): 23. EBSCOhost (31255139).

[58] David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 244.

[59] My understanding of a "rhetorical vision" draws on Ernest Bormann's work with fantasy theme. He defines a rhetorical vision as "the composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality." Ernest G. Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972): 398. EBSCOhost (9376445).

[60] Roxana Waterson, "Trajectories of Memory: Documentary Film and the Transmission of Testimony," *History & Anthropology* 18 (2007): 66. EBSCOhost (24471250).

E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, films that engage socially traumatic events provide an opportunity to culturally define an otherwise baffling or disorienting abject encounter. They argue that films "have become a cultural institution in which the traumatic experience of modernity can be recognized, negotiated, and reconfigured."[61]

The 2004 revelation of torture by U.S. soldiers at the Iraqi prison Abu Ghraib created a "nationalistic ambiguity" for the American public, confusing "the public mind about [its] national identity and purpose."[62] This national identity crisis unleashed a firestorm of controversy surrounding the status of the American Subject that was publically negotiated through government, MNO, and popular culture discourse.[63] Discourses that challenge the prevailing master narrative are what I understand to be a counter-narrative, a "way for people to make sense of their lives when an existent narrative" no longer adequately explains the world.[64] The fracture of the master narrative and subsequent challenge by a counter-narrative marks the site of trauma and social horror. Further, social horror manifests itself in the horror artifacts the social body creates. As noted previously, for McGee, because a social body is brought into being by debates over national identity, the rhetorician has the responsibility to try to understand the social body through its rhetorical artifacts. He writes, "through the analysis of

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[61] E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, "From Traumatic Paralysis to the Force Field of Modernity," in *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, eds. E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 17.

[62] Amani Ismail, Mervat Yousef, and Dan Berkowitz, "'American' in Crisis: Opinion Discourses, the Iraq War and the Politics of Identity," *Media, War & Conflict* 2 (2009): 150. EBSCOhost (53113697).

[63] Just as "Nine-Eleven" stands for more than the events that occurred on September 11, 2001, the phrase "Abu Ghraib" is larger than the events that transpired there. Although the Abu Ghraib scandal is the actual event that is analyzed in this project, it encompasses a much larger rhetorical environment of torture that extends from Guantanamo Bay to Bagram Air Force base to even larger questions surrounding the entire "War on Terror." My use of Abu Ghraib as a symbolic touchstone for these issues and the trauma associated with them is consistent with the literature and with public perception; Roger Luckhurst notes, "The images from Abu Ghraib [are] metonymies for a larger 'war on terror,' [and] have insistently raised questions of the representation of torture and our traumatic reactions to it." Roger Luckhurst, "Beyond Trauma Torturous times," *European Journal of English Studies* 14 (2010): 13. EBSCOhost.

[64] Acevedo, Ordner, and Thompson, "Narrative Inversion," 126.

rhetorical documents … it should be possible to speak meaningfully, not of one's own, but of *the people's* repertory of convictions, not as they ought to be, but as they *are* (or have been)."[65] For McGee, the critic should use rhetorical artifacts to understand how a social body understands itself and, in turn, how it rhetorically constructs itself through those artifacts. The Abu Ghraib torture scandal opened a new traumatic wound in the American Nine-Eleven narrative and I contend that this project can provide insight into the horror of this trauma through the analysis of corresponding artifacts in the American culture. By examining how "horror" has been deployed, in the wake of Abu Ghraib, we can better understand the culture that produced such horror.

LOOKING AT HORROR NARRATIVES

The popularity of horror stories is on the up-swing again in mediated entertainment; from zombies and vampires to your average work-a-day knife wielding psychopath, we see these visions of horror in music, literature and, with the successes of HBO's *True Blood* and AMC's *The Walking Dead*, it appears as if even television is wading again in to these bloody waters.[66] It is the horror film, however, that is "the unparalleled exercise in fright[,] incredibly robust and quite even immortal."[67] The popularity of horror films, however, doesn't make much sense intuitively. It stands to reason that most people would seek out cheerful stories "as entertainment: escapism, diversion – a brief holiday from the confines of one's own head."[68] Noting the

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[65] McGee, "In Search of 'The People'," 249. *Emphasis in original*.

[66] Although I argue that the popularity of horror is on the rise in film, it is a genre that never really dwindles in its appeal and has turned movie theaters into "intensive scare units" since "Thomas Edison filmed 'Frankenstein' in 1908." Timothy M. Gray, "Adventures in the Scream Trade," *Variety*, November 4-10, 2002, 90. EBSCOhost (7738916). In fact, the medium of television has a rich history in horror as well – from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* to *The Twilight Zone*, to *Tales from the Crypt* and beyond.

[67] Jonathan Crane, "Scraping Bottom: Splatter and the Herschell Gordon Lewis Oeuvre," in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 150.

[68] Amanda Brotchie, "Story and Storytelling," *Australian Screen Education* 1 (2002): 101. EBSCOhost (9459056).

paradoxical position of the horror film, Noël Carroll asks "how can we explain its very existence, for why would anyone *want* to be horrified?"[69] It is the illogical, yet consistent, popularity of horror as a genre that insists there is something else going on, something beyond the scare. There must be some fundamental reason that one of the very first motion pictures ever made, Georges Mélié's 1896 film *The Devil's Manor*, was a horror film.[70] Movies matter to us as a social story, and the horror movie in particular has a special legitimacy, a hardened core of truth, that speaks to what frightens all of us and invokes a "tradition as real and as deeply grounded in mental experience as any other pattern or tradition of [hu]mankind."[71] For Stephen King, the horror film "points even further inward, looking for those deep-seated personal fears – those pressure points – we all must cope with."[72]

In cinematic history, horror films often go through "cycles" in which a particular sub-genre (or type) of horror film dominates the cinematic landscape (e.g. the alien invasion movies of the 1950s).[73] By the mid-2000s, the political use of torture had become part of the public discourse surrounding the Bush administration's "War on Terror." It is not merely coincidental that, at the same time, there was a marked rise in the popularity of horror films that focused on the torture of its protagonists by sadistic antagonists.[74] According to one measure, of the 99 horror films were released

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[69] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 158. *Emphasis in the original.*

[70] Tony Magistrale, *Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), xi.

[71] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 3.

[72] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1981), 131.

[73] Horror cycles will be dealt with in more detail in future chapters.

[74] These films were labeled "torture porn" in the literature. Examples of the torture porn genre include: *Hostel, Wolf Creek, Turistas, Captivity* and the *Saw* franchise.

theatrically from 2003 – 2008, 24 were classified as "torture porn."[75] An alternate web site lists 110 horror films released during the same time period and lists 29 of them as torture porn.[76] In both cases, nearly 25% of theatrical horror films released from 2003-2008 were classified as torture porn and tallied nearly $800 million in total box office revenue. This is a substantial revenue stream and only accounts for the tickets sold at the box office, meaning it doesn't include DVD sales, rentals, or the under-17 audience who bought tickets to *Shrek 3* and snuck into *Turistas*. Although it is impossible to say there is a *causal* link between the social debate on torture and the rise of the torture porn sub-genre, it does appear to be more than a coincidental emergence, and this project will attempt to map out the possible connections between the two.

The critics and watchdogs of cultural decency almost universally reviled torture porn. Film critic Lisa Schwarzbaum flat out refused an assignment from her editor to review the film *Captivity*. She wrote, "It's quite simple: I hate these movies. I won't see these movies. … [M]y horror is one of disturbance and anger: Who makes this vile crap?

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[75] The web site, boxofficemojo.com, breaks down horror films based on genre and includes only films that had a theatrical release (even if limited), so "straight to DVD" films are not included in these numbers. Further, even though this web site lists the first torture porn film released as *House of 1000 Corpses*, it does include the recent re-makes of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Hitcher*, so it should be noted that torture porn must have existed as a category prior to 2003 even if it wasn't labeled as such. Still, the prevalence of this genre since 2003 supports the overall argument that a distinct cycle ran from 2003-2008. "Box Office Mojo - Genres," accessed June 10, 2011, http://boxofficemojo.com/genres/. The phrase "torture porn" was coined by David Edelstein. See David Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn," *New York Magazine*, January 28, 2006, accessed May 5, 2009, http://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/, par. 1.

[76] The numerical disparity between these two sites appears to be a definitional question of what constituted a "theatrical release." Films that didn't meet the criteria of limited distribution (informally defined in the industry as being released in four separate cities) weren't listed by boxofficemojo but were listed at thenumbers. This informal definition is drawn from Fox Studios' handling of the film *Idiocracy*. While neither the filmmakers nor the studio will comment officially, multiple sources speculate that the studio was contractually required to deliver a "theatrical release" prior to the film being released on DVD. Fox Studios, ostensibly wishing to do the minimum to meet those requirements, originally released the film in Austin, Chicago, Dallas and Houston, which leads to the assumption of a four city informal definition. For an example, see Nihar Patel, "A Paucity of Publicity for 'Idiocracy'," National Public Radio, September 8, 2006, accessed May 12, 2011, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5788260.

What is remotely defensible about a movie like *Captivity*?"[77] Lenore Skenazy calls torture porn all "bed-hopping / head chopping" and warns, "If we start accepting this kind of movie as just 'extreme' horror, the baseline will change. What once seemed out of line will become mainstream."[78] And it's not just the film critics who feel that torture porn has gone too far; there were so many complaint calls coming into the offices of film distributor After Dark Productions (distributor of *Captivity*), that part owner Courtney Solomon said they "just stopped answering the phones."[79] Even Roger Luckhurst, who promotes the academic investigation of torture and cultural trauma through cinematic representations, tosses torture porn into the dustbin as "complicitous in this brutalization," commenting that the genre "would probably find few active defenders."[80]

These harsh comments regarding torture porn serve to remind us that films that truly horrify are often the targets of scorn.[81] No matter how tame a horror film of the past may seem today, many were met with resistance during their initial release because they often deliberately tap into that which traumatizes the social body at a given moment in history. Although George A. Romero's zombie classic *Night of the Living Dead* could be shown on network television today virtually uncut, in 1967, acclaimed film critic Roger

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[77] Lisa Schwarzbaum, "What I Hate," *Entertainment Weekly*, July 27, 2007, 50. EBSCOhost.
[78] Lenore Skenazy, "It's Torture! It's Porn! What's Not to Like? Plenty, Actually," *Advertising Age*, May 28, 2007, 13. EBSCOhost.
[79] Claude Brodesser-Akner, "Why Torture Porn is the Hottest (And Most Hated) Thing in Hollywood," *Advertising Age*, May 21, 2007, 3. EBSCOhost.
[80] Luckhurst, "Beyond Trauma," 15.
[81] It is hard to quantify a phrase like "truly horrify." For me, there is a difference between a film that scares and one that horrifies. A monster that leaps from the darkness can scare an audience in any decade, but that monster horrifies the audience only when it gestures to something beyond the sensation of being startled. Linda Williams' theorizations on "body genres" further inform my understanding of a "horrifying" film. She argues that a film in the body genre (she isolates pornography, horror, and dramatic "weepies") succeeds if "the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen." Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44 (1991): 4. EBSCOhost (12140162). From this, I contend that a horrifying film necessarily connects the physical reaction of watching the film with the psycho-social interpretation by an audience.

Ebert used it as a justification for the new Code of Self Regulation adopted by the Motion Picture Association of America. He wrote that the kids in the audience had

> seen some horror movies before, sure, but this was something else. … I felt real terror in that neighborhood theater last Saturday afternoon. I saw kids who had no resources they could draw upon to protect themselves from the dread and fear they felt. … In a case like this, I'd want to know what the parents were thinking of when they dumped the kids in front of the theater to see a film titled, 'Night of the Living Dead.' … I don't know how I could explain it to the kids who left the theater with tears in their eyes.[82]

In his article (he claims to have reviewed the audience instead of the movie), Ebert was clear that he opposed censorship, but *Night of the Living Dead* was a new kind of horror film that "stopped being delightfully scary about halfway through, and had become unexpectedly terrifying."[83] In a particularly revealing review of *Night of the Living Dead*, the film industry publication *Variety* urged the Supreme Court to set "clearcut [sic] guidelines for [this] pornography of violence" and condemned the "moral health of filmgoers who cheerfully opt for this unrelieved orgy of sadism."[84] Although published in 1967, this is a line that *Variety* could easily have published in their review of *Saw*, from the pornography reference to the accusations of audience sadism. In 1967, *Night of the Living Dead* pushed the limits of artistic taste because it forced audiences to engage their traumas. Today, the same film is an accepted masterpiece because it speaks to cultural traumas the social body has (presumably) already worked through and no longer finds horrifying.[85] *Night of the Living Dead* may still be scary, but it is no longer

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[82] Roger Ebert, "The Night of the Living Dead," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 5, 1967, Entertainment section, Final edition.

[83] Ebert, "Living Dead."

[84] Quoted in Charles Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), 72.

[85] As evidence that *Night of the Living Dead* is now considered a masterpiece, it was named to the Library of Congress' National Film Registry for significant cultural films in 1999. See David Kehr, "At the Movies," *The New York Times*, January 10, 2003, Performing Arts section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

culturally horrifying because the racism it interrogates has been confronted (however unresolved it remains).[86] Other examples of "horror run amok" include EC Comics' *Tales From the Crypt*, which was run out of business when comic books adopted their own rating system in 1954, and *Dracula* precursor *Varney the Vampire,* which was tagged as a "penny dreadful" by the critics who warned of the failure of "the morality of horror fiction."[87]

The historical, popular resistance to the horror genre, however, shouldn't be particularly surprising when we understand its aims: horror forces us to face our demons and, as Julia Kristeva noted, it can't be horrifying if it isn't distressing.[88] For John Kenneth Muir, there is one unavoidable truth: "horror movies universally mirror the anxieties of their age and their audience. … If horror isn't relevant to everyday life … it isn't horrifying."[89] The films that are culturally horrifying are the ones that speak to unresolved social traumas, which the now completed torture porn cycle seemed to do in abundance. Columnist for the *Los Angeles Times,* Aaron Lee, notes that torture porn films might "warrant an Abu Ghraib-inspired think piece," and *Hostel* director Eli Roth contends that torture porn films "are producing cathartic experiences and showing us our deepest darkest fears in a post-9/11 world. … In [Roth's] eyes, [*Hostel* is] a reaction to

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[86] This also explains why there are some horror films that transcend a cycle. For example, the supernatural horror film has been consistently popular throughout the history of cinema. As Michael Murphy notes, "Narratives that have enduring appeal and popularity over time are likely to address issues central to the culture in which they reside and deal with fundamental developmental and psychological concerns for individuals." Murphy, "Wizard of Oz as Cultural Narrative," 531.

[87] King, *Danse Macabre*, 393. King details these, and other examples, on pages 387-409.

[88] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

[89] John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1990s*, ed. John Kenneth Muir (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011), 3.

the war in Iraq, how Americans are seen across the world and our commodity-driven world."[90]

This brief review of literature about horror as an entertainment genre is important because horror is *not limited to entertainment contexts*. If we understand horror as a response to, and a stimulus of, biological fear, then horror can be seen as a genre that spans multiple different types of texts. Eli Roth explicitly links *Hostel* and the war in Iraq because horror is not limited to horror films – horror is not only an aspect of the films about Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib, but the MNO coverage and administration discourse as well, inspiring fear through rhetorical framing. For Gergory A. Waller, understanding the horror film in a broad sense can yield a goldmine of academic discovery and the scholar of contemporary horror cinema should see horror as "an extraordinarily diverse group of texts that epitomize the tangled workings of American popular culture, which is at once business, art, and the purveyor of entertainment and ideology."[91]

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[90] Aaron Lee, "Surely You Can't Be Serious," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 2008, Sunday Calendar section, Final edition. LexisNexis. Claire Hill, "Welcome to the Meat Factory," *The Western Mail*, June 22, 2007, Features section, Final edition. LexisNexis. Some argue that torture porn is pure sadistic voyeurism. This concern will be more fully addressed in future chapters, but, as a preliminary defense, I will refer to feminist scholar Carol Clover's eloquent defense of the slasher genre (which faced similar accusations of sadistic voyeurism). Clover refuses to "believe that sadistic voyeurism is the first cause of horror," and notes that all horror exists in some fashion at the margins. Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19.

[91] Gregory A. Waller, "Introduction," in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 1. There are multiple examples of scholars who open up fascinating discussions by broadening their interpretation and understanding of the horror film. For example, Caroline Picart and David Frank perform a fascinating criticism of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* by looking at its structural similarities to slasher films, in particular, *Psycho*. See Caroline J. S. Picart and David A. Frank, "Horror and the Holocaust: Genre Elements in 'Schindler's List' and 'Psycho'," in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Thus far, I have looked briefly at the biological basis for fear and how it becomes deployed and managed rhetorically as horror. I expanded our rhetorical frame to begin a larger discussion of master narratives and how the American Subject can be rhetorically constituted by our cultural stories. I then contextualized such rhetorical constitutions to horror with Terror Management Theory and opened an investigative thread as to what place rhetoric might have in times of cultural upheaval and national trauma, looking specifically at the place of governmental, news media, and popular culture discourse in relation to the 2004 release of photographs depicting torture in Abu Ghraib prison. Moving forward, I will more closely examine the function of horror discourse in relation to Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib. To this end, the study is organized into six chapters that move dialectically between the news and media reportage on Abu Ghraib and the fictional films that deal, in one way or another, with the debate surrounding torture.

The first chapter begins the discussion as to how both individual and national identity is formed. It grounds this project's understanding of the subject in psychoanalytic theory and explains the interactions between personal fantasy, social stories, and cultural master narratives. It also explores current theories of trauma and uses those in an effort to better understand the psychosocial impact of master narratives that no longer adequately explain the world for the social body that created them. And lastly, because this is a project that hopes to better understand the rhetorical implications of horror, I explore the work of one of the most influential theorists when it comes to issues of horror and abjection, Julia Kristeva. I attempt to explain the interactions between her psychoanalytic understanding of horror and trauma theory and situate her work in relation to the modern horror film. This first chapter thus provides the reader with a detailed account of my theoretical assumptions.

With my theoretical assumptions laid bare, the second chapter forwards a description of my preferred method of analysis: frame genre criticism, a hybrid approach of frame analysis and genre criticism. Here I more fully explain the benefits of using a frame genre criticism in analyzing rhetoric and defend the approach against its critics. I first differentiate genre criticism along three axes: literary studies, film studies, and rhetorical studies. I also detail how frame analysis is used to look at patterns between the large number of texts that construct a social discourse. These two approaches, taken together, form a hybrid method of close reading that allows me to move dialectically between discrete texts and a larger cultural discourse that can account for affect in a diverse set of artifacts that neither approach alone can accomplish. I also provide a short history of the different historical cycles in horror films and the various ways they have been considered in rhetorical studies. This chapter seeks to explain and defend the methodology I will employ in analyzing the artifacts selected and detail how my deployment of frame genre criticism is unique from how it has been traditionally understood in rhetorical studies.

With the understanding that my study moves dialectically between two levels of discourse – master narratives and smaller, more focused stories – the third chapter outlines Nine-Eleven as *the* master narrative of the contemporary American Subject, since September 11, 2001, both in how it was formed and how it is currently understood. It also examines the counter-narrative that challenged the Nine-Eleven master narrative in the wake of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal. First, I analyze over 150 news reports to outline how the structure and themes of the Nine-Eleven narrative were constructed. Second, I explain the traumatic impact of the Abu Ghraib scandal – as discerned in media reportage – and look at over 100 news reports to illustrate how the public release of the torture photographs ruptured the consistency of the Nine-Eleven narrative. This chapter

tracks the patterns that emerge from both the Nine-Eleven master narrative and the Abu Ghraib counter-narrative, which establishes the terrain upon which the subsequent rhetorical artifacts will be mapped. I outline that there are three distinct "tellings" of these narratives: (1) the events at Abu Ghraib did not constitute torture, were the decision of a handful of soldiers, were necessary for the War on Terror, and should be secondary to the memory of Nine-Eleven; (2) the events at Abu Ghraib were probably torture and responsibility should be placed directly at the feet of the Bush administration; (3) the events at Abu Ghraib were unquestionably torture and all Americans were complicit in the moral failings.

The fourth chapter performs a frame genre analysis of the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films. Here I look to see if the thematic and structural patterns that emerged from the Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib narratives are present in popular culture artifacts. The patterns that emerge deal with a question of who the American Subject is, the importance of information, a move to action, and a focus on the missing body. All of the films contain these structural and thematic patterns, but how they manifest themselves are somewhat different. In the Nine-Eleven films, these themes follow closely with the Nine-Eleven master narrative and are reminiscent of the administration's invoking of, and memorializing, the events of September 11, 2001. Conversely, the Testimonial films deploy these themes to advance the argument that the Bush administration is to blame for the torture at Abu Ghraib conforming to structure and themes of the public counter-narrative. I conclude that these two sets of films work dialectically with each other to structure a larger cultural discourse, but neither engages the question of torture itself, which leaves a residual traumatic kernel that threatens the psychical health of the social body.

The fifth chapter performs a frame genre analysis of sixteen torture porn films, using Eli Roth's 2005 film, *Hostel*, as the primary case study. I look to see if the thematic and structural patterns that were present in the other films are present here as well. I find that the torture porn films do contain similar structures and thematic patterns, but that they are often inverted in the name of horror – the missing body as the reappearing body and the move to action as a vengeful role reversal. These inversions act as a direct engagement with the issue of torture that the previous narratives and films side-stepped. I argue that torture porn, by taking up the issue of torture directly, mediates the dialectic between the master narrative and counter-narrative, and between the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films.

In the sixth chapter, I reexamine the texts from previous chapters from a psychoanalytic perspective to better understand what, if any, psychotherapeutic potential exists for the audience of these films. I argue that the Nine-Eleven films offer a negative sublimity by ignoring the larger issue of torture and continuing a memorialization of Nine-Eleven as a founding trauma. The Testimonial films, for their part, provide the audience an opportunity for working-off by redirecting the trauma toward the administration. Torture porn, in their direct confrontation with the horror of torture, may provide audiences a potential for working-through the trauma of Abu Ghraib by holding open the wound of abjection. To be clear, my argument is not that any of these films must do a particular kind of rhetorical work, but that a critic can better understand the national discourse at that time through a reading of these films in relation to the subject rhetorically constituted by them.

Finally, my study concludes with several observations regarding the rhetorical impact of horror as it relates to our personal and national identities. In these concluding remarks, I examine what can be learned by reading the three sets of artifacts together as a

larger discourse. Through my analysis I conclude that there are three "lessons" that can be taken away with regard to horror as a patterned discourse. First, that horror is dangerous and holds the potential to manifest itself through violence. Second, in relation to trauma, horror both marks the site of the event through a gap in understanding and marks what the subject *wishes* the traumatic event to be. And third, I conclude that horror films, specifically torture porn, carry psychotherapeutic potential for the subject who wishes to confront the abjection at the core of subjectivity as such.

There is a substantial body of literature that examines trauma, identity, and horror. There are few attempts, however, to look at the intersection between them and even fewer that do so in relation to a contemporary issue. For the past decade, there have been numerous rhetorical struggles to define the American Subject. The political and social landscape of American society is changing rapidly as increasingly divisive groups battle for rhetorical supremacy in their hopes to write our national story. This project will not answer every question, but it can, hopefully, provide an explanation of one of the recent rhetorical struggles over the right to claim what it means to "be an American." If successful, this project can serve as a heuristic for thinking about how trauma and horror are evoked or deployed to answer, however tentatively, questions of personal and national identity.

Chapter 1

The Stories We Tell: Identity, Narrative and Horror

Rhetorician Walter Fisher contends that what separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom is our ability to tell stories and understand our world through those stories. For him, "narration comes closer to capturing the experience of the world" than does a reliance on logical argumentation or technical discourse.[92] From the earliest cave drawings and tales of the saber tooth tiger regaled around the cooking fire to today's paperback novels and the accounts of corporate mergers told around the water cooler, we are story-telling animals. We share stories to entertain, to teach, to build intimacy, and to understand the world around us. The world as we perceive it is a product of the cultural narratives that find "the essence of human thought … in the stories we use to inform and indoctrinate ourselves as to the nature of reality."[93] According to Miller Mair, humans "live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture."[94] To update the metaphor, we might say moments of our lives unspool around us just like a reel of film and we structure our lives around how we understand those stories, both personal and social.

If narrative is what helps structure a meaningful life, what happens when we are unable to narrate an event? In psychoanalysis, such a narrative failure is termed a *trauma*, which is different from how the word is popularly understood. A trauma isn't

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[92] Walter Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 14.
[93] George S. Howard, "Culture Tales: A Narrative Approach to Thinking, Cross-Cultural Psychology, and Psychotherapy," *American Psychologist* 46 (1991): 193. EBSCOhost (AMP 46-3-187).
[94] Miller Mair, "Psychology as Storytelling," *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 1 (1988): 127.

necessarily contained to a hospital emergency room and doesn't even have to be a life-altering event (though it can be that as well). From small personal set-backs to large social events, a trauma occurs any time the narratives we use to understand our world fail us. In this chapter, I explain how we understand our world through the use of personal and master narratives, and then explain what happens when these stories unravel or fail. Understanding how narratives structure the meaningful world – and how they structure us – will provide a useful frame for making sense of the Nine-Eleven discourse that this project examines in succeeding chapters. To this end, I will first explain how personal identity is formed through a specific narrative structure, fantasy, and how this structure is deployed through the social body by narratives and stories. Second, I will look at the relevant literature in trauma studies and psychoanalytic theory to better understand the impact of the failure of stories in the world. Finally, I will turn to the work of Julia Kristeva and her theorizations of horror and the abject to more fully flesh out the rhetorical features of trauma.

Before continuing, however, it is important to underscore the theorists discussed in what follows are all related to, but distinct from, one another. For example, the concept of fantasy is not the same for Julia Kristeva as it is for Walter Fisher. In my use of these theorists, I found the variety of approaches and assumptions to be refreshing and informative, but I do not claim a theoretical fidelity to any one of these scholars and will be careful to distinguish and define the working concepts of this study from the thinkers that inspire it. Together, these thinkers' ideas form a tapestry of theory that informs my thinking on fantasy, narrative, trauma, horror, and identity, and believe that the net result is worth sacrificing "theoretical purity."

FANTASY, NARRATIVE, AND THE INDIVIDUAL STORY

Fisher and many other rhetorical theorists assert that the dominant way in which humans structure their understanding of the world is through narrative. Since its inception in the work of Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis has shared a similar conceit. As it evolved over the past century, psychoanalysis holds that in our earliest incarnation as a subject, we organize our lives around the stories we are told and the stories we tell ourselves, which has come to be known as "phantasy" or, simply, "fantasy."[95] Not to be confused with the more commonplace understanding of "fantasy" as imagination, the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy is more akin to an internalized story.

For Freud, the concept of fantasy first emerged in 1897 when he began to lose faith in his theory of seduction. After treating so-called hysterics for many years, Freud initially theorized that hysteric behavior originated in early childhood molestation. He gradually realized that, if seduction theory were true, there would have to be a widespread epidemic of child sexual abuse and thus his initial "seduction theory" was in error. Freud concluded in a letter to his friend Wilhelm Fliess that "the neurotic symptoms [of the treated hysterics] were not related to actual events but to wishful phantasies, and that as far as the neurosis was concerned psychical reality was of more importance than material reality."[96] Giving rise to arguably one of the most important concepts in psychoanalysis (that reality itself is discursively constructed), in this letter, Freud laid the groundwork for a fundamentally new conception of subjectivity.

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[95] The word "fantasy" is sometimes spelled "phantasy" in psychoanalytic literature to denote a term of art where authors wish to differentiate it from a generalized understanding of a "fantasy." I chose a spelling of "fantasy" for this project because, while "phantasy" is the spelling used throughout the *Standard Editions* of Sigmund Freud, Bruce Fink's translations of Jacques Lacan prefer "fantasy," and my interpretation of the way fantasy functions in relation to social trauma is more closely aligned with a Lacanian reading. That said, I have preserved the spelling of "phantasy" in quotations from Freud.

[96] Sigmund Freud, "Letters to Fliess," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, trans. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 111.

A few years after his abandonment of seduction theory, in some of his earliest work on fetishism, Freud theorized the phenomenon of '*Spaltung*,' or a splitting of the ego, which acts as an internal defense mechanism and represents a subject that "is divided within him [or her] self."[97] Building on his concept of fantasy, and understanding that ego splitting is not isolated to the fetishist, Freud wrote that, "the ego often enough finds itself in the position of fending off some demand from the external world which it feels distressing [and] is effected by means of a *disavowal* of the perceptions which bring to knowledge this demand from reality."[98] Here, the split ego exists somewhat unaware of the split, such ignorance acting as a defense mechanism against parts of the outside world that don't fit within the worldview of the subject. Freud concluded that ego-splitting illustrates "how little of all these processes becomes known to us through our conscious perception."[99] The stories the ego uses to construct and understand identity are internalized, told and then re-told, often without a conscious decision by the subject. Years later, Jacques Lacan would make special note of this concept and use it as the basis for his own understanding of subjectivity. He writes,

> if we ignore the self's radical eccentricity with respect to itself that man is faced with – in other words, the very truth Freud discovered – we will renege on both the order and pathways of psychoanalytic mediation; we will make of it the compromise operation that it has, in effect, become – precisely what both the spirit and the letter of Freud's work most repudiate.[100]

For Lacan, it is fantasy that covers over the split and, like Freud, acknowledges both the connection of fantasy to desire and its function as a defensive mechanism.[101]

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[97] LaPlanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 427.

[98] Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949), 60-61. *Emphasis in original*.

[99] Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, 61.

[100] Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in *Écrits*, ed. Bruce Fink, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 435.

[101] Although Freud and Lacan hold similar views regarding fantasy, there are important differences between them. Freud argued that the "motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single

The theorist who most rigorously developed the concept of fantasy in a way that comports with contemporary notions of narrative and rhetoric is Lacan.[102] To understand how fantasy functions for Lacan, one must first understand his theorizing of the three registers of human experience: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.[103] For Lacan, meaningful reality is an overlapping experience of image, language, sound, and their absence. When a child is born, s/he has no concept of reality beyond the rush of stimulus that seems to be coming from everywhere, but which has no meaning. At this point, the infant is a product of pure biology and the "needs" of biology: s/he needs to eat, to excrete, have shelter, and so on. If those biological needs are not met, the infant will certainly die because "we are unable to provide ourselves with most of what we need, and must appeal to others to attend to our needs. We call upon them to help us, and do so by crying."[104] When the infant is hungry, s/he cries, a breast appears and the need is satiated. The infant cannot differentiate him or herself from the breast that feeds or even the world around him or her; it is all one and the same, a purely narcissistic experience relegated to the register of existence Lacan terms the Imaginary. The child sees no difference between him or herself and the mother until a third person enters into picture

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phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality." Freud, "Creative Writers," 439. These wish-fantasies manifest themselves in dreams and demand fulfillment by "entering consciousness as a sense-perception, undergoing, as it does so, the secondary elaboration to which every perceptual content is subject." Sigmund Freud, "Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*, ed. Philip Rieff, trans. Cecil M. Baines (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 154. For Lacan, fantasy is bound to desire, but serves a defensive function "against castration, against the lack in the Other." Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 60. Although he makes special note of Freud's recognition of the split, Lacan understands the split subject is not for simple ego defense, but as a result of the subject's incorporation into the Symbolic order and, as such, his understanding of fantasy as a defense mechanism is tied more closely to notions of desire than is Freud's. The idea that fantasy drives desire is a Lacanian turn.

[102] Arguably, it is less Lacan proper and more of Slavoj Žižek's reading of Lacan.

[103] Throughout this project, I will take my lead from Žižek and capitalize Lacan's registers of existence in an attempt to minimize confusion with other uses of the words "imaginary," "symbolic," and "real."

[104] Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 235.

(creating a tripartite) that both demands the attention of the mother and introduces the child to the concept of prohibition, what Lacan terms the "Name of the Father." This is the first introduction of the Symbolic register for the child, which is also the realm of "the social" (that there is something beyond the itself and the mother). Further, the original moment of prohibition is an opening up to a world beyond the world of images (the Imaginary); the child not only "sees" him or herself, but also the parents as individual beings "out there."[105]

After the introduction of the tripartite domain of experience – the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the "reality" of something that escapes both (the Real), the child enters into the mirror stage of development – the point where s/he recognizes him or herself in the mirror.[106] During the mirror stage, the child recognizes him or herself as distinct from the mother, but also misrecognizes the specular image reflected back as whole and complete.[107] The child, realizing the need to be a social being, claims its agency through the use of language and becomes enfolded by Lacan's second register of existence, the Symbolic. For Lacan, the child's decision to enter the Symbolic – and leave the realm of the Imaginary – is the first cut of castration. This moment is simultaneously the splitting of the subject, because the Symbolic register is always-already incomplete.[108] It is this split that also creates desire out of what was demand – in the Symbolic register, a demand

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[105] For Lacan, the tripartite is also the seed for the fundamental fantasy – the hope to fully satiate desire as one did need.

[106] Lacan argues that we initially develop in an Imaginary world of images and even become obsessed with images.

[107] This misrecognition of wholeness and complete mastery one's body is what Lacan terms the *imago*. For him, this is a narcissistic reminder of the Imaginary and feeds the fundamental fantasy. As will be more fully explained later, the importance of both the *imago* and the fundamental fantasy is that it represents a core of the human experience, one that can be exploited by those who wish to manipulate the behavior of others with a promise to make the subject whole.

[108] For a complete discussion of how the subject is formed through both the mirror stage and the subject splits upon integration into the Symbolic, see Lacan, "The Mirror Stage." and Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject."

is not only a demand to satiate a need, but also an impossible demand for love and recognition from the Other. Because this demand is impossible, there is a remainder, which constitutes itself as desire. Arguing that this frustration is what differentiates his theory from Freud, Lacan writes,

> Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is demand for a presence or an absence. This is what the primordial relationship with the mother manifests, replete as it is with that Other who must be situated *shy* of the needs that the Other can fulfill. Demand already constitutes the Other as having the "privilege" of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of what alone can satisfy them. The Other's privilege here thus outlines the radical form of the gift of what the Other does not have – namely, what is known as love. … This is why desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*).[109]

Prior to the introduction of the Symbolic register, an infant's demand could be fully satiated; after the mirror stage, however, every demand carries with it an unfulfilled remainder, a perpetual desire. The subject addresses that desire through fantasy, which can never satiate desire, but can maintain its endless pursuit.[110] It is because desire finds

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[109] Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," 579-580.

[110] The endless pursuit of desire is maintained by what Lacan terms the *objet a*, or the object cause of desire, which orients the subject toward the Other. As Lacan explains, "Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand – whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the Other – opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction." Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject," 689. The *objet a* is anything that sets desire in motion, but shouldn't be thought of as either a tangible thing or as something to be attained. In most instances, the *objet a* will be an excess, the something more that isn't. This is articulated in Lacan's graph of desire by the algebraic ($ ◊ *a*), the split (speaking) subject in relation to the *objet a* answering the question "*Chè vuoi*?" or "What does the Other want from me?" Here, the subject's "desire is the Other's desire" and fantasy serves to cover over the reality that the Other is actually incomplete. Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject," 690. This provides psychical stability through what Lacan terms "the lure of fantasy," that which is "in reality the *support* of desire," meaning that fantasy and desire work together to continue desire ensuring it is never satiated and the lack is therefore never revealed. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 186. For the subject, the *objet a* is what s/he believes will make him or her whole and satiate desire, but it actually functions only "to sustain itself as desire, in its state of non-satisfaction." Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999), 297. Possession of the *objet a* cannot satiate desire and, in fact, its appearance serves as a disruptive force to fantasy through an impossible reconciliation with what

its origins in the mirror stage that Lacan refers to that entry point into the Symbolic as the fundamental fantasy, "the means by which the subject maintains himself [sic] at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing inasmuch as the very satisfaction of demand deprives him of his object."[111] We live our lives seeking out the wholeness we experienced prior to the prohibition inherent in the Name of the Father (the pre-Oedipal), and fantasies are the stories we tell ourselves to explain away the impossibility of that pursuit, to dismiss the split in the speaking subject. As Michael J. Hyde explains, "desire is what will move an individual through the symbolic order in search of those objects which have for the individual a relationship to some signifier experienced in pre-Oedipal development, a signifier that gave pleasure to the individual."[112] To understand the futility of that search, however, we must engage Lacan's third register of existence: the Real.

For Lacan, language can never fully explain the world as it is – a gap always remains, which is encompassed by the register of the Real. Lacan argues that because the world we know is bound with the Symbolic, encounters with the Real are inherently traumatic and fantasy serves to both cover over the impossible nature of desire and shield the subject from the Real. As Joshua Gunn explains, "fantasy is inspired by the Real as a fundamental defense mechanism of subjectivity, a screen from the horrors of 'naked nature,' understood as a meaningless void that we recognize most consciously in moments of trauma."[113] The three registers work together in the service of the subject – e.g. the fantasy of the Symbolic serving to protect the subject from the trauma of the

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Slavoj Žižek terms "the hard kernel of the Real." Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 10.

[111] Lacan, "Direction of the Treatment," 532.

[112] Michael J. Hyde, "Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory of Speech and Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 101. EBSCOhost (9993534).

[113] Joshua Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Talking to the Dead," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 7. EBSCOhost (13087643).

naked Real. Lacan explains the interactions between the three registers of existence as a Borromean knot, "a group of three rings which are linked in such a way that if any one of them is severed, all three become separated."[114] For the subject, *fantasy is one of the mechanisms used to hold this knot together*.[115] As Kris Pint explains,

> The almost miraculous functioning of the fantasy consists in turning what presents itself as a destructive excess on the level of the real into a lacking object which sustains the desire of the subject on the level of the symbolic. As the subject is merely the effect of the fantasy, rather than its cause, we can neither choose our fundamental fantasy nor the (by definition) unrealizable desire that unconsciously directs our life.[116]

As we mature and begin to understand ourselves in relation to the world around us, it is the mechanics of our psychical fantasies that orient our identity. Fantasy literally "teaches us how to desire" and "provides a 'schema' according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure."[117]

Over time, these personal fantasies spin themselves out into structured narratives, which not only frame how we see the world, but begin to write our scripts and assign roles for us to play. According to scholars like George Howard, the early socialization process is foundational in establishing the identity one will perform in his or her social life as an adult. The narratives we encounter early in our lives are far from determinate, but, as we make our choices, these stories begin to paint our perception of the world through the maintenance of value systems that give the lived life meaning. Howard writes,

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[114] Evans, *Introductory Dictionary*, 18.
[115] Understanding how fantasy holds the three registers together is important because it is the failure of fantasy in a traumatic event that severs those ties and exposes the subject to the naked horror of the Real.
[116] Kris Pint, "How to Become What One Is: Roland Barthes's Final Fantasy," *Paragraph* 31 (2008): 40. EBSCOhost (32549088).
[117] Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 7.

> We are in the process of creating value in our lives – of finding the meaning of our lives. A life becomes meaningful when one sees himself or herself as an actor within the context of a story. … Early in life we are free to choose what life story we will inhabit – and later we find that we are lived by that story.[118]

As we age, we stop "telling stories," and the stories begin to tell themselves through us. As Lacan explains, for a speaking subject bound in the Symbolic, fantasies act as the structuring mechanisms for that subject's reality where "the fantasy-aspect is infinitely more important than its event-aspect. Whence, the event shifts into the background in the order of subjective references."[119] As we become adults, our personal narratives interact with our environment to provide psychical stability and become formalized into what Dan McAdams calls a "life story." According to McAdams, these life stories solidify a person's identity within the enviro-social context and finalize a person's worldview. He notes that this identity explains the world and gives the individual a feeling of purpose "within a socio-historical matrix that embodies a much larger story. A person's world establishes parameters for life stories. In this way identity is truly psychosocial: The life story is a joint product of person and environment."[120] Whether or not one is convinced by the complex particulars, what is important for all of these theorists – Freudian, Lacanian, or post-Lacanian – is the recognition that the human animal is a social being and that the creation of fantasies, narratives, and stories all occur in relation to other people.[121]

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[118] Howard, "Cultural Tales," 196.

[119] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 34-35.

[120] Dan P. McAdams, *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1988), 18.

[121] I understand fantasy, narrative, and story as conceptually distinct. For clarification, *fantasy* is a relationship between the subject and any object that manifests desire where the function of fantasy is "to suture the social order by papering over its inexorable failure to harmoniously reconcile the individual and society." Stephen Healy, "Traversing Fantasies, Activating Desires: Economic Geography, Activist Research, and Psychoanalytic Methodology," *Professional Geographer* 62 (2010): 501. EBSCOhost (53773228). *Narrative* is the structured tale told by the subject that gestures toward the fantasy function. I say "gestures toward" because no narrative can ever expressly reference the impossibility of desire as the

So far, I have described how psychoanalysis characterizes how our stories explain our selves, our world and, perhaps most importantly, ourselves in the world.[122] I argued

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function of the narrative is to distract from that impossibility. *Stories* are the larger conglomerations made up of multiple narratives from different contexts that give insight into how the subject understands the world. The conglomeration of stories (or, more accurately, the structuring of these stories) serves to make up the *master narratives* that serve to distract from the impossibility of ever knowing a cultural subject. By way of further illustration, I will try to put these concepts into more concrete terms with an admittedly inelegant example. A young boy, Steve, wants nothing more than the love of his mother (which is the residual excess that makes up desire). At the age of seven, Steve climbed the tree in his backyard to retrieve the family cat (who had gone up the tree and then refused to come down). Afterwards, Steve's mother lavished him with kisses and praise at what a "brave little boy" he had been. From this point, Steve began to unconsciously equate love with bravery. This exists at the level of fantasy because (1) the wish to be perceived as brave is what sets desire in motion, (2) there is no actual connection between the perception of bravery and love, but creates the potential for endless pursuit, and (3) the fantasy covers over the impossibility of love because of the split nature of the loving subject (this is the protection from the Real). When Steve became an adult, he sought out what he believed would be the bravest career choice, unconsciously hoping to win the love and approval of his mother, and decided to join the military. During his service he accumulated multiple narratives of bravery (structured tales of him behaving in a brave manner). Taken together, these narratives (and others depicting Steve's bravery) culminated in a life-story of Steve as a brave man deserving of the admiration of others (which served to distract from the reality that there is no true connection to the mother's love that he unconsciously seeks). These narratives are both descriptive of the person *and* prescriptive of what he must do in certain situations. For example, if Steve encountered a burning car on the side of the road, he would risk himself to save the driver because this is what brave people do (which is an example of our life-stories writing scripts for us). The stories of Steve and other brave men and women from the military circulate throughout the culture and structure themselves together to create a cultural *master narratives* that the decision to serve in the military is a brave one and that the armed forces are filled with those willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the nation. Throughout this project I will refer to these social stories as "master narratives" or "cultural narratives." In this case, the master narrative surrounding this cultural understanding of the military acts to obfuscate the reality that we can't make such general claims about those who decide to serve in the military and that none of us can ever truly "know" the soldier.

[122] I say "perhaps most importantly" because, although both personal fantasies and the cultural master narratives influence one another, the master narrative seems to hold the dominant position in the relationship between them. This is because our personal fantasies are formed through a cultural understanding. The dominance of the master narrative can be related to the driving force of desire and the lack in the personal fantasy and the position of fantasy as the author of our personal narratives and stories. Both fantasy and master narratives attempt to cover up the traumatic gap in the Symbolic, which gives them a mutual goal for the subject and almost assuredly results in their interaction. The subject is "born into" a culture of master narratives and, because the master narratives precede the formation of the subject, fantasy is always-already partially structured by those cultural narratives. As Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis explain, "The idea of the subject as lack cannot be separated from the subject's attempts to cover over this constitutive lack at the level of representation by affirming its positive (symbolic-imaginary) identity or, when this fails, through continuous identificatory acts aiming to re-institute an identity. This lack necessitates the constitution of every identity through processes of identification with socially available traits of identification found, for example, in political ideologies, practices of consumption, and a whole range of social roles." Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity: Fantasy and Enjoyment in Psychoanalysis and Political Theory," *Subjectivity: International Journal of Critical Psychology* 24 (2008): 260-261. EBSCOhost (33934874). In fact, our

that humans structure their understanding of the world through stories, which also serve to paper over contradictions in one's life experience. The individual internalizes certain stories as they solidify their personal identity and, over time, these stories become structured into narratives. These personal narratives are told and retold throughout a culture, which rhetorically constitutes a social body and, through a series of increasing abstraction, helps to establish the master narratives of a nation. Yet, my reason for theorizing the narrative conception of fantasy is for understanding its failure: what happens when our stories fall apart?[123] In the next section, I examine how psychoanalysis describes the failure of fantasy as traumatic and examine the current scholarship of trauma studies. After that, I will look at Julia Kristeva's explanation of the relationship between fantasy and trauma to more fully understand horror and abjection – two experiences that mark the dissolution of fantasy and that will prove central to the analysis in later chapters.

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fantasies interact with master narratives to explain away the split in the Other. Mari Ruti argues that fantasies "render the world satisfactory by reassuring us that the Other – the social environment within which we struggle to find our bearings – possesses the correct, calming, or consoling answers to our most pressing questions." Mari Ruti, "Life beyond Fantasy: The Rewriting of Destiny in Lacanian Theory," *Culture, Theory & Critique* 51 (2010): 2. EBSCOhost (51484687). Moving away from a purely psychoanalytic defense, there is also interdisciplinary support for the claim that master narratives drive personal narratives. For example, Chris Heffer notes how cultural master narratives can be used as predictors of individual juror bias in criminal court cases, Chris Heffer, "Narrative in the Trial: Constructing Crime Stories in Court," in *The Routledge Handbook of Forensic Linguistics*, eds. Malcolm Coulthard and Alison Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2010). Lynn S. Bliss and Allyssa McCabe argue that cultural background can impact the way personal stories are structured, which alter how they are understood, Lynn S. Bliss and Allyssa McCabe, "Personal Narratives: Cultural Differences and Clinical Implications," *Topics in Language Disorders* 28 (2008). WoltersKluwer (00011363-200804000-00008). F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin warn of the dangers of cultural narratives overwhelming personal narratives in qualitative research, F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," *Educational Researcher* 19 (1990). Even when the personal narrative is marginal, it can be said to come from a subculture that is only understood in relation to the master cultural referent. None of this, however, is to say that master narratives are monolithic determinants of identity; rather, it is evidence that as we form and tell our personal stories, they are inevitably colored, in some way, with the brush of the dominant culture.

[123] Again, for definitional clarity, fantasy exists in relation to desire, narrative is the attempted structuring of fantasy, and story is the conglomeration of narratives, which may intersubjectively help construct a master narrative socially.

THEORIES OF TRAUMA

Trauma studies first gained traction in the academe with scholarship examining the long-term impacts of the Holocaust, not only on survivors, but the culture at large. Karyn Ball notes that the scope for trauma studies widened to explore the cultural impact of the Vietnam War in the 1980s with the release of "a varied set of texts from which critics could problematize naïve notions of realism and authenticity while raising questions about the cultural significance of the testimonial, documentary, and fictional forms of representation."[124] Ball contends the high point for trauma studies was the few years following the release of two foundational books, one edited by Cathy Caruth and the other, a collection of Caruth's essays.[125] Of the many theoretical interpretations that Caruth brings to the discussion of trauma, the one that most impacts this study is her explanation of the impossibility of the comprehensibility of a traumatic event. The event itself, according to Caruth, is one that denies comprehension and, as such, marks a place of impossibility in the subject's understanding and his or her ability to speak through the trauma. For her, there is "a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it."[126] Referencing the compulsion to repeat and primary repression (the defense mechanisms that push some thoughts or events to the unconscious), Caruth notes that there is "another, more profound, disappearance: the loss, precisely, of the event's essential incomprehensibility, the force of its *affront to*

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[124] Karyn Ball, "Trauma and its institutional destinies," *Cultural Critique* 46 (2000): 8. For Ball, trauma studies increases in popularity during the 1990s because it bridges the gap between the materiality of suffering and the poststructuralist critique of the subject. Trauma studies recognizes the "reality" of an event, but because its focus is on the rhetoricity surrounding the event (through memory, interpretation, etc.), scholars are given a unique opportunity to comment on social situations without facing resistance in the "theory wars" going on at the time.

[125] Prior to being collected in book form by Johns Hopkins University Press, many of the essays appeared in a special edition of *American Imago*, edited by Cathy Caruth. See *American Imago* 59 (2002) for more detail.

[126] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 91-92.

understanding. … The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what [the subject] cannot understand, but in that it understands too much."[127] The incomprehensible nature of the event implicates the work of trauma theorists such as Kai Erikson, for whom trauma is not confined to an individual, but may be expanded to include "traumatized communities" which can result "from a constellation of life experiences as well as from a discrete happening."[128] For Caruth, one cannot simply listen to the tale of a person who has been traumatized, because one person never has access to the reality of an event. Rather, one must listen to the layers of stories about a traumatic event to "gain access to a traumatic history" to understand "the reality of a history that in its crises can only be perceived in unassimilable forms."[129] This statement suggests that trauma carries with it a dialectically negotiated reality and a mediated interiority for the impacted subjects. Because Caruth's insights are drawn from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is important for us to examine the theoretical contentions in which she grounds her arguments.

Trauma in psychoanalysis

In psychoanalytic theory, mental endeavors are generally guided by the pleasure principle – the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain.[130] Although pleasurable pursuits are sometimes delayed by the reality principle (the demand that persons behave in a socially acceptable manner), this driving force is never entirely forgotten, and the

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[127] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction: Recapturing the Past," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 154.
[128] Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185.
[129] Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 156.
[130] Sigmund Freud, "Some Thoughts on Development and Regression -- Aetiology," in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966). It should be noted that Freud did alter his assumptions regarding the pleasure principle with his theorizations of the death drive.

subject will accept "the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road *to* pleasure."[131] Trauma, however, is the moment where the pleasure principle is confounded, instead of merely delayed, such that "what is feared, what is the object of anxiety … cannot be dealt with by the normal rules of the pleasure principle."[132] It is marked by "[a]n event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization."[133] In economic terms, a trauma is said to occur when the psychic excitations are so intense that the severity of the stimulus can't be worked-through or siphoned off through the normal defense functions of a person. Trauma, then, prevents the normal pursuit of pleasure by causing an individual to return time and again to an event that interrupts this pursuit by bringing the ego into a state of upheaval such that no response to the trauma is adequate. As a result, existing coping mechanisms fail and the subject "construct[s] a symptom [as] a substitute for something else."[134] These symptoms mark the failure of the pleasure principle as the traumatized unconscious seeks "to break through the pressure weighing down on it and force its way either to consciousness or to a discharge through some real action."[135] The result is what Freud terms the "return of the repressed" as the traumatized subject "yields to the compulsion to repeat."[136] For example, a severe car crash could be a traumatic event for many people. The fear that accompanied the event doesn't necessarily go away after the

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[131] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 4. *Emphasis added.*

[132] Sigmund Freud, "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965), 117.

[133] LaPlanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 465.

[134] Freud, "Fixation to Trauma," 347.

[135] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 13.

[136] Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 151. For a concise discussion of the return of the repressed see also Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), 197-200.

accident report is filled out and the insurance company has paid for repairs to the car. A person may feel anxiety when s/he goes for a drive and may experience nightmares long after the event has passed. This is an indication that the event broke through the person's psychic defense mechanisms (and was, therefore, traumatic) and even though s/he has attempted to push the memory into the background, it returns, time and again, through anxiety or dreams.[137]

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, trauma is intimately linked to his conception of the three registers of existence.[138] As previously noted, for Lacan there is the Imaginary, made up of the specular, the Symbolic, the world of language, and the Real, "the domain of that which subsists outside of symbolization."[139] Although the Imaginary plays a role with the *Prägung* (the specular imprinting of the traumatic event), Lacan's primary focus in his later work is on the interaction (or, more accurately, the impossible interaction) between the Symbolic and the Real. The Symbolic encompasses the world of the subject, inclusive of the fantasies of the master narratives, where he or she is "the slave of a discourse in the universal movement of which his [sic] place is already inscribed at his birth."[140] The Real, conversely, is everything that resists signification, and it is the encounter with the Real that constitutes a baseline experience of trauma. To be more precise, it is not the actual encounter with the Real that is traumatic, though the Real is an object of anxiety, but, rather, "the missed encounter with this real object which presents

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[137] A very contemporary example of the return of the repressed, and the focus of many psychological studies in trauma, is the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that some American soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are experiencing.

[138] Throughout this study I will follow the lead of Slavoj Žižek and capitalize Lacan's three registers (Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real) because I find it helpful in differentiating terms. That said, some authors make reference to these terms in lower-case and, when quoted, I will maintain the choice of the original authors in capitalization preference.

[139] Lacan, "Response to Hyppolite's," 324.

[140] Lacan, "Instance of the Letter," 414.

itself in the form of trauma."[141] Joan Copjec describes this missed encounter as a "lack of a lack, a failure of the symbolic reality wherein all alienable objects, objects which can be given or taken away, lost and refound, are constituted and circulate."[142] Put more simply, when an individual comes into contact with the Real, she or he "misses" the experience because of the incapacity to reckon with the event from within the Symbolic and, thus, becomes fixated on that which cannot be signified.

Returning to our car crash example, the moment of impact for the passenger is an encounter with the Real. At that moment, words fail and there is nothing but the rush of experience (it is not some confrontation with brute reality that is the Real, but the gap or impossibility of symbolization and meaning). Some may go into a state of "psychological shock" where they sit, dazed and in silence. One crash victim describes her traumatic experience in a 2007 issue of *Professional Psychology*: "Once at home, I barely slept, feeling fearful, panicked, numb, and detached. I began the nonstop reliving of the incident, with attendant guild, shame, and self-blame. The details of the accident seemed vague, and I began to second-guess my memory."[143] The crash itself was an encounter with the Real, but the trauma occurred belatedly as she tried, and failed, to move the event into the realm of the Symbolic. The subsequent nightmares she describes are examples of Freud's "return of the repressed" and indicative of what Lacan terms fixation as the traumatized subject attempt to work-through by integrating the event into

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[141] Evans, *Introductory Dictionary*, 160.
[142] Joan Copjec, "Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety," in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (New York: Routledge, 2000), 53.
[143] Anonymous, "The Impact that Changed My Life," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 38 (2007): 561. EBSCOhost (20080107).

the Symbolic.[144] For this reason, Freud termed the experience of trauma as a kind of "afterwardness."

Bruce Fink notes that "trauma implies fixation or blockage. Fixation always involves something which is not symbolized, language being that which allows for substitution and displacement – the very antithesis of fixation."[145] This fixation, however, is not registered by the person's consciousness and exists as a loss of a loss, circulating around the trauma but never speaking its name. In Freudian terms, the traumatic "returns" as repeated floating signifiers and signifieds "*tied together* at that moment … not exactly anchor[ed] to anything."[146] For Kristeva, when "the symbolic dimension proves insufficient," there is a risk that traumatized subjects may become melancholic and "find themselves back at the dead-end of a helplessness leading to inaction and death."[147] Interestingly, Lacan posits that such a death would constitute the ultimate encounter with the Real, for death itself is "the essential object which isn't an object any longer, [but] something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*."[148] This anxiety is produced when one encounters an event that refuses incorporation into the Symbolic. For our car crash victim, it is important to note that she began to second-guess her memory and that the

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[144] The concept of "working-through" comes into play when the traumatized subject has met with psychical resistance. It is a corresponding term to remembering and repetition for Freud, but is marked by a repetition that is modified by interpretation and can resolve fixation. LaPlanche and Pontalis explain it as the "process which is liable to halt the repetitive insistence characteristic of unconscious formations by bringing these into relation with the subject's personality as a whole." LaPlanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 489.

[145] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26.

[146] Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading 'Écrits' Closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 113.

[147] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 36.

[148] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 164.

details seemed vague; the entire episode eludes her attempts to make meaning of it. The crash itself was a "missed experience" and she can only work-through the trauma by anchoring the event to language. And the crash victim is only traumatized insofar as that anchoring fails – over and over.

Belated trauma and the role of fantasy

So where does the role of narrative and fantasy come into an experience of trauma? Trauma implicates rupture in two distinct, but related, narrative contexts: the personal fantasy and the master narrative. For both Freud and Lacan, traumatic events are always experienced retroactively, in terms of what Freud dubbed *nachträglichkeit* (translated as "deferred action" in the *Standard Edition*, but more often as "belatedness" or "afterwardness" in trauma studies). Referencing Freud's work with a famous patient called "the Wolf Man," who suffered from severe depression, Lacan notes

> the traumatic force of the imaginary break-in produced by this spectacle is under no circumstances to be located immediately after the event. … This *Prägung*, strictly limited to the domain of the imaginary, re-emerges in the course of the subject's progress into a symbolic world which is more and more organized.[149]

The event itself is not initially traumatizing but is imprinted, as *Prägung*, in the Imaginary acting as a type of placeholder. For our car crash victim, seeing the motorcyclist fly into her windshield imprinted itself in the Imaginary, but she describes her trauma in the years that followed as she tried to make sense of the event. The image of the motorcyclist acts as a placeholder and is the specular moment in which language failed her. It is when the subject fails in his or her attempts to signify this imprint that "the scene [is] traumatized, elevated into a traumatic Real, only retroactively" as the Symbolic order fails to provide signification and the event is "resuscitated to fill in the

[149] Lacan, *Seminar I*, 189-190.

gaps in the universe of meaning."[150] In psychoanalytic terms, this "universe of meaning" that creates and organizes identity are psychic fantasies that maintain a stable subject within the Symbolic.

In addition to, or more likely as a result of, fantasy's structuring of our mediated reality, it also serves as a defense against trauma and the maintenance of a stable psychic functioning. This is why trauma tells us so much about the importance of narrative and, by extension, the centrality of fantasy for meaning-making. Fantasy gives meaning to reality such that "the standard functioning of fantasy [is] the protective screen that enables the subject to domesticate the trauma."[151] As Joshua Gunn explains, "fantasy is inspired by the Real as a fundamental defense mechanism of subjectivity, a screen from the horrors of 'naked nature,' understood as a meaningless void that we recognize most consciously in moments of trauma."[152] When one's fantasies are externally challenged by an event that is both inconsistent with the fantasy world and resists incorporation into the Symbolic register, the subject is unwillingly forced to confront the limitations of his or her fantasies and experiences a trauma, by definition a belated experience of meaninglessness. The *Prägung* reveals what Žižek calls the "hard kernel of the Real" where "all efforts to integrate traumatic historical events into a totalizing system result in a leftover, a troubling remainder."[153] This remainder challenges the ability of the master narratives to coordinate our fantasies, threatening our very identity. Gaps in the master

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[150] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 73-74.

[151] Anna Kornbluh, "Romancing the Capital: Choice, Love, and Contradiction in 'The Family Man' and 'Memento'," in *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, eds. Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle (New York: Other Press, 2004), 133-134.

[152] Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy," 7. Here, Gunn is talking about a gap in the Symbolic – his term "naked nature" is taken from Robert Freed Bales.

[153] Leonard Wilcox, "Don DeLillo's Libra : History as Text, History as Trauma," *Rethinking History* 9 (2005): 346. EBSCOhost (17628453). For an insightful explanation of how Žižek understands this kernel of the Real, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 47-49.

narratives serve to illustrate a lack, a refusal of the notion of "master" and the supposed universal nature of the narrative.[154]

When we think of a trauma, we often frame it in personal terms when our individual stories fail, but there are times when entire social bodies are traumatized when their master narratives fail. As an example of the traumatic effect when these master narratives are challenged, Slavoj Žižek often turns to religious discourse. Atheistic refusal to allow religion to link truth and meaning together is "the point at which religion itself faces a trauma," where there emerges an analogous "gap between life and meaning" which deprives religion its universal explanatory power in such a way that "life and meaning do not in any way fully overlap."[155] A single gap in the narrative, the atheist's denial of a Godly truth, unravels the master narrative's ability to structure meaning in life, which is its psychic function as fantasy. These gaps refuse integration into the Symbolic, acting as a "troubling remainder," which box out the ability of fantasy to guard against the cut of castration, the encounter with the Real, the horror of trauma.

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[154] Earlier, I provided an extended example to differentiate between fantasy, narrative, and story. Toward the end of that example, I explained my understanding of master narratives in their relationship to these concepts. At this point, the interactions between personal fantasy and the cultural master narratives are becoming more pronounced and perhaps an additional example to clarify my definitional intent would be helpful. A personal fantasy is one that is internalized by the individual and influenced by the master narratives of a culture. The master narrative is a cultural creation that helps to coordinate personal fantasies. For example, a master narrative in the United States is that the justice system protects the innocent and punishes the guilty through a variety of protections. Jane, trusting in this master narrative, has constructed personal fantasies as coordinated by this master narrative. She is skeptical of "racial profiling" claims and believes that police officers are often just "doing their jobs." She has unwavering respect for her neighbor, a member of the highway patrol, and her uncle, who is a city district attorney, because they both mete out justice as agents of the system. A traumatic event can be a challenge to the master narrative, which causes personal fantasies to lose their anchor point. For example, Jane might read a story about a man who was executed, but new evidence found him to be innocent. Additional research shows Jane that this is not an isolated instance and her faith in the justice system master narrative is shaken. She begins to re-think her position on "racial profiling" and looks at her neighbor and uncle in a new light. It does not mean that she suddenly will believe her uncle to be untrustworthy or an evil man, but this rupture to the master narrative means she no longer takes these notions on faith.

[155] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 182.

To illustrate how trauma interacts with master narratives, let's return once again to our car crash example, which links a personal event with a larger, cultural narrative. Let's assume that the driver believed that the roads were safe because traffic laws were written to ensure safety (a master narrative of sorts). Further, she assumed that she was, personally, a good driver because she followed the rules of the road (individual fantasy constructed around the master narrative). Though our driver believed she was following the traffic laws, the dark section of the road obscured the motorcyclist and resulted in an accident that caused his death. The driver was never convicted of a crime, but the master narrative suffered a fracture – even if traffic laws were followed, the roads were not necessarily a safe place and she (and others) were not necessarily safe, nor was she even a good driver, just because she followed rules. The motorcyclist's death was the troubling remainder that fantasy could not guard against and that was traumatizing.

To summarize, assemblages of meaning are constructed in the Symbolic register through an incorporation of fantasies, bound with the master narratives of a given culture and the personal life story of the individual, both of which constitute the subject as a social being.[156] These fantasies serve as both a guiding subjective drama and a mode of prohibition as the Imaginary is integrated into the Symbolic.[157] At the moment of trauma,

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[156] In Lacanian terms, an explanation of how master narratives assist in the creation of the subject as a social being can be found in Lacan's essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function." Here Lacan details the need for a third party, the paternal figure, to intervene in the mother-child dyad to stave off psychotic narcissism. This paternal figure often takes the form of social prohibitions where the "very normalization of this maturation is henceforth dependent in man [sic] on cultural intervention." Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 79. As we will see in the next section, it is not the intervention of the paternal, but the active repulsion of the maternal, that is key to Kristeva's work. At the end of that section, I will show how looking at both sides of the Lacanian split (the Symbolic subject for Lacan and the Abjected subject for Kristeva) will provide us rich theoretical ground to better understand genre.

[157] The word "integrate" may be misleading as it implies a trajectory, or movement, from one register (the Imaginary) to another (the Symbolic). For Lacan, the three registers of existence aren't separate, but tied together in a Borromean knot, which denies conceptualization in three-dimensional space. I don't wish to belabor the point here as it doesn't have any true impact to the argument being forwarded, but I did feel the need to explain that while I use terms that denote motion through Euclidean space to describe these concepts, they do not, and in fact cannot, represent such movement. For a more detailed discussion of the

the *Prägung* (the Imaginary imprint) resists Symbolic integration and retroactively takes on a repressed characteristic of the traumatic. It becomes traumatic because its Symbolic impossible nature relegates it to the register of the Real – this separates the event from the conscious subject a begins a cycle of repetition, which psychoanalysis terms the "return of the repressed." Traumatic symptoms are marked by gaps in the fantasies of the traumatized subject and circulate around this hardened core of the Real; the subject works-through a given trauma by reassembling master narratives through the new coordination of fantasies.[158] The question now before us now is *how* this coordination of fantasies occurs. What accounts for the coordination of fantasies? How does a traumatized subject re-narrativize the world for meaning making?

Reconciling the traumatic experience

Trauma occurs when an individual encounters the Real and, therefore, resides where the "link between two thoughts [have] succumbed to repression and must be restored" by explaining the encounter through the world of the Symbolic.[159] Because a traumatic event is repressed and never eliminated from psychical functioning, the inability to reckon with traumatic moments prompts individuals to repeat, yielding neuroses or recurring dreams that arise as traumatized individuals attempt to "to make their performances [of traumas] rhythmical and to keep them isolated from other actions."[160] But, the insufficiency of these attempts to isolate the trauma prompts the subject to cope with the ever-resurfacing event through repeated, but continually inadequate, coping strategies. The alternative is death, living or final. As Freud alleges,

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three registers as a Borromean knot, see Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 123-136.

[158] Lacan, *Seminar I*, 187-199.

[159] Fink, *A Clinical Introduction*, 49.

[160] Freud, "Sense of Symptoms," 335.

these repeated attempts to work-through are such that "it is as though these patients had not finished with the traumatic situation."[161] Regardless of the number of times that these events and coping strategies are repeated, until the experience is signified, the traumatic event continues to emerge through repetition as the individual struggles to symbolize the event. From this point, trauma "intrudes into our psychic life and disturbs its balance. … From this perspective, the problem is how to symbolize trauma, how to integrate it into our universe of meaning and cancel its disorienting impact."[162]

It is through the compulsion to repeat that an interactive subject may reconcile the traumatic experience. As Mardi Horowitz explains, a traumatic experience will return until it is mastered and it is "through such repetition images [that] idea[s] and affects may be worked through progressively."[163] To drain it from the Real, the *Prägung* "has to be symbolized" and interactively "put into signifiers" to alleviate the traumatized subject's fixation.[164] A key addition here is the notion of interaction; the subject cannot work-through the trauma on his or her own, and the process is not as simple as giving the traumatic event a name. The signifying process is dialectical, and brings the event into interaction with other signifying elements, setting the discourse of the subject in motion. Working-through becomes possible when there can be a "substitution of one loved object for another or the displacement of cathexis from one object to another. … [T]o say it and bring it into relation with ever more signifiers, it undergoes 'dialectization.'"[165] Such a dialectic requires mediation or negotiation, because the trauma is "a form closed off" to

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[161] Freud, "Fixation to Trauma," 340.
[162] Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, 73.
[163] Mardi J. Horowitz, "Psychic Trauma: Return of Images After a Stress Film," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 20 (1969): 4. EBSCOhost (1969-15779-001).
[164] Fink, *A Clinical Introduction*, 49.
[165] Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 26.

the subject that "only opens up through verbalization [with] the other."[166] Alone, the traumatized subject circulates around the issue where his or her "discourse traces a contour around that which it hovers about," but interaction allows for an emergent interpretation that forces out the event and puts it in conversation with other signifiers; this "is what Lacan means when he says that 'interpretation hits the cause.'"[167] By connecting symbols to the traumatic encounter with the Real, the disruptive event becomes displaced and sense making may begin, such that "the trauma reappears, in effect, frequently unveiled."[168] Within Freudian and Lacanian clinical practice, this unveiling assumes the analyst as the other and integration often takes the form of verbal attempts to work-through the trauma. Does this verbalization, however, foreclose the potential of working-through trauma in other ways, or outside of the clinical setting?

Although classical psychoanalysis holds a privileged place for the "talking cure," as Ann Cvetkovich and others have noted, working-through, or reckoning with a traumatic event, can take the form of resistant practices and identities that perform the ways in which an encounter with the Real chafes against dominant modes of symbolism.[169] In effect, symbolic practices other than the "talking cure," especially in an artistic expression, serve the process of sense-making in much the same way as psychoanalytic therapeutic techniques. Many scholars have discussed film watching and film making as a mode of therapeutic doing. For example, as horror films have long acted as a barometer for social perceptions, such representations "can become a means of staging an encounter rather than the protected turning away from the fearful limit

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[166] Lacan, *Seminar I*, 283.
[167] Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, 28.
[168] Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 55.
[169] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

frontier."[170] Further, because films are "powerful sources of embedded life-event narratives," they are able to tap into the stories we use to construct and maintain our worldview. [171] In particular, the repetitions that we find in genre films mimic the compulsion to repeat that the traumatized subject experiences, albeit much less intensely. Just as the traumatic experience returns to the surface time and again until it is worked-through, the cinematic representation of that trauma returns to the theater time and again until the genre cycle closes. In his work on mediated representations of torture in film, Roger Luckhurst maintains that, "the tropes and narratives of genre are good devices with which to think unthinkable or say unsayable things."[172]

Although Freud and Lacan discussed trauma as an individualized incident, an emerging body of research suggests that entire communities, even entire countries of people, can be traumatized by large-scale cultural events. Social trauma emerges from "an unexpected, often violent event that affects a community rather than one or several individuals; it results from politically motivated human behavior and has political consequences."[173] Our life stories are informed not only by personal experience, but "by constitutional and cultural factors" as well, meaning that culture can similarly be "subject to the returns of repressed materials, unarchived secrets, that allow us to discern patterns in their repetitions."[174] A social trauma challenges the national identity through a disruption of the cultural master narratives such that "the patterned meanings of the

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[170] Griselda Pollock, "Art/Trauma/Representation," *parallax* 15 (2009): 52. EBSCOhost.
[171] Bruce Ballon and Molyn Leszcz, "Horror Films: Tales to Master Terror or Shapers of Trauma?," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 61 (2007): 219. EBSCOhost (26266493).
[172] Luckhurst, "Beyond Trauma," 17.
[173] Amiram Raviv et al., "Young Israelis' Reactions to National Trauma: The Rabin Assassination andTerror Attacks," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 300.
[174] Griselda Pollock, "Freud's Egypt: Mummies and M/others," *parallax* 13 (2007): 69. EBSCOhost.

collectivity are abruptly dislodged."[175] When a culture's master narratives no longer adequately explain the world, the social body suffers a traumatic episode. In an effort to work towards a better understanding of rhetorical fear, however, this project concerns itself not just with social trauma, but that which generates fear in the citizenry.

In this section, I have described what happens when narratives rupture. When our fantasies no longer adequately explain the world, there is a traumatic event – in Lacanian terms, an encounter with the Real. Trauma occurs when existing defense mechanisms fail and this failure is imprinted in the Imaginary register. Psychoanalysis contends that such a trauma has a belated quality to it in that the trauma occurs when the imprinted event resists incorporation into the Symbolic and refuses signification by the subject – the trauma exists as a "missed event." It is this missed event that reveals the limitations of fantasy and can threaten not just the ruptured narrative, but the entire edifice upon which that narrative was based. For the traumatized subject, the goal is to work-through the trauma by providing signification to the imprinted trauma, and this can be done through a variety of narratives and story-telling techniques, including the stories of popular culture. I contend that horror stories can act as such a process of working-through, but the question remains as to the affective place of horror within trauma. In the next section, I will examine the work of Julia Kristeva and her work with abjection to better orient a theory of horror as it relates to the traumatic dissolution of fantasy.

JULIA KRISTEVA, HORROR, AND ABJECTION

In my introductory comments, I used the term "horror" to denote the rhetorical manifestations of biological fear. Horror, however, can also be understood as an affective response. Before I outline how horror is a rhetorical manifestation, however, it

[175] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.

is useful to discuss one of the most widely read theorizations of horror in the humanities. In her book, *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva argues that true horror is an abjection, a free-floating terror that resists all attempts to be named. For her, horror "has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I."[176] We are simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by it; as the radically excluded, the abject is marked by its ejection from the Symbolic, "on the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me."[177] There has been a fair amount of academic work in rhetorical studies surrounding Kristeva's writings, most notably in the service of affect and feminist theory.[178] Few of these discussions, however, take more than a passing notice of Kristeva's discussion of the affective dimensions of fear, nor how these dimensions intersect with horror and abjection rhetorically.[179] What Kristeva adds to our

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[176] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.

[177] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

[178] The example most closely related to the case study of this project is the work of Barbara Creed's "monstrous feminine," in which she deploys Kristeva's theories of abjection to explain horror films that feature the "woman as monster." Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Mostrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," *Screen* 27 (1986). EBSCOhost (31426388). Creed's 1993 book expanded on this essay and sought to more fully examine issues that she felt had been neglected in both film and feminist studies, hoping to discover "what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject." Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1. Other examples include Claire Sisco King, who examined the violence in David Fincher's *Fight Club* to outline the contours "of masculinity as an abject ideological formation." Claire Sisco King, "It Cuts Both Ways: *Fight Club*, Masculinity, and Abject Hegemony," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 367. Susan Sydney-Smith deploys the concept of the abject maternal body to argue that the television series *Prime Suspect* is a point of interruption in the masculine discourse of police dramas. Susan Sydney-Smith, "Endless Interrogation: *Prime Suspect* Deconstructing Realism Through the Female Body," *Feminist Media Studies* 7 (2007). Pamela Turton-Turner merges the abject body with Eco's carnival of humor to examine the spectacle created in nude charity calendars. Pamela Turton-Turner, "The Role of Ridicule in Naked Charity Calendars," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 21 (2007). Barbara Biesecker examines the abject body in relation to how we remember World War II and the politics of feminine portrayals in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. *Barbara A. Biesecker, "Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Politics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century," Quarterly Journal of Speech 88 (2002). EBSCOhost (8737803).* Time and again, Kristeva's work with abjection is positioned through mediated texts as an interrogative entry point hoping to examine the assemblages of power.

[179] In the study of affect, scholars who employ Kristeva often move away from abjection and focus on her distinctions between the symbolic and semiotics. Kristeva contends that semiotics must be "understood as moving beyond simple linguistic studies toward a typology of signifying systems composed of semiotic materials and varied social functions. Julia Kristeva, "The Ethics of Linguistics," in *Desire in Language: A*

understanding is a richer explanation for why the function of horror cinema changes in the face of cultural upheaval. Her theorizations on abjection mirror our current understanding of trauma, but illuminate a particular type of trauma, an abjected trauma, that she identifies as horror.[180]

Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Alice Jardin Thomas Gora, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 34. Kristeva's conception of the semiotic is different from Saussure's, and more closely tied to human emotion, which explains its usefulness in the study of affect. D. Robert DeChaine uses her work with poetic language to chart the power of music in the signification of the body. D. Robert DeChaine, "Affect and Embodied Understanding in Musical Experience," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 22 (2002). EBSCOhost (9325954).. Brian Ott employs semiotic analysis to discuss affective response in film viewership. Brian L. Ott, "The Visceral Politics of 'V for Vendetta': On Political Affect in Cinema," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27 (2010). EBSCOhost (48361752). Among the scholars most interested in the place of affect in rhetorical studies is Joshua Gunn. He and Rice contend that the discipline became "uncomfortable with the instability of its object" of speech, so much so that "any discussion of an 'affective turn' in communication studies is more properly described as (an) 'about face'." Joshua Gunn and Jenny Edbauer Rice, "About Face/Stuttering Discipline," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 215. EBSCOhost (39453006). Like others, Gunn seems to find Kristeva most useful in her depiction of the semiotic *chora*, which he and Hall define as "that unified space, traversed by primary energies, which … encloses the sounds, rhythms, colors, and pleasures of the mother/child dyad in one highly sensate environment." Joshua Gunn and Mirko M. Hall, "Stick it in Your Ear: The Psychodynamics of iPod Enjoyment," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 5 (2008): 156-157. EBSCOhost (32708726). For Gunn, the *chora* allows for affective responses in communicative behavior through the maternal voice, separate from language or the paternal law of the father. Joshua Gunn, "Speech Is Dead; Long Live Speech," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008). EBSCOhost (33716674).

[180] When reading Kristeva's account of horror and abjection with an eye towards the existing theory in trauma studies, I found remarkable similarity between the two. For example, Kristeva argues that abjection is marked first by the symptom, where language gives up on the "non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor," that is "huddled outside the paths of desire." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11. Within the symptom, primary repression exists in relation to language and the "return of the repressed" is marked by a failure in the Symbolic order. This gap, which threatens the release of the abject, sparks a compromised Symbolic to rush in and attempt to suture the cut, but is marred by inevitable failure which Kristeva terms "secondary repression." Kristeva writes, "Secondary repression, with its reserve of symbolic means, attempts to transfer to its own account, which has thus been overdrawn, the resources of primal repression. … It is then that the object … appears as abject." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 15. The abject, like traditional trauma, cannot be dismissed; once encountered, abjection continues to repeat and assert itself. Following her own thoughts on repetition compulsion, Kristeva notes the abject "is *repeated*. Getting rid of [the abject] is out of the question … one does not get rid of the impure; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 28. *Emphasis in original*. Here, the symptom functions as a belated trauma (after imprinting) that occurs when the *objet a* of fantasy reveals the fundamental gap (the non-assimilable monster) in the master narrative. The failure of the Symbolic order to rectify the fracture requires work by the subject to reseal the psychic defenses and reorient his or her fantasmic identity.

According to Lacan, the subject enfolded by (or as an enfoldment of) the Symbolic is at once split. For Kristeva, Lacan's work explains what the subject becomes by its inclusion into the Symbolic register, but fails to account for what the subject wishes to escape. Like the Real, the abject denies all attempts to signify it and persists as a residual within everyone. For Kristeva, this residual abjection is born as the Lacanian subject splits; the recognition that one is distinct from the m(O)ther causes its radical exclusion, setting aside a void of exclusion in the subject.[181] In this sense, Kristeva provides an account of the other side of the Lacanian split – the flip side to the barred subject as articulated through the Symbolic. As Bert Oliver explains, Kristeva "theorises the 'negative' or 'antecedent' side of the subject's becoming a distinct and distinctive individual, someone with a sense of 'self.'"[182] An abjected traumatic episode is an exposure of the residual abjection, which short-circuits the ability of fantasy to protect the subject against the Real. In normal psychical functioning, the endless pursuit of desire through fantasy maintains equilibrium. In an abjected traumatic episode, however, the subject actively excludes, or more accurately rejects, that pursuit of desire and organizes his or her psychical energies around a fear of something.[183] This "something," the object

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[181] As explained earlier, the *objet a*, the object cause of desire, is the driving force of fantasy and orients the subject in relation to the Other. For Kristeva, the radical exclusion of the m(O)ther is a concurrent rejection of the limited *imago*. Although it is not understood at this point in the infant's development, a subsequent recognition of the futility of the *objet a* (that it can never satiate desire) will rupture the fantasmic constructions of the subject and act as the core of an abjected traumatic episode.

[182] Bert Olivier, "Nature as 'Abject', Critical Psychology, and 'Revolt': The Pertinence of Kristeva," *South African Journal of Psychology* 37 (2007): 451. EBSCOhost (27130477).

[183] Drawing on the work of André Green and his theorizations of trauma-objects, Kristeva concludes that this rejection must be the maternal figure and a prerequisite to the eruption of abjection. In an abjected traumatic episode, this rejection manifests itself as the named object of fear. Kristeva writes, "Abjection then takes the place of the other, to the extend of affording him *jouissance*, often the only one for the borderline patient who, on that account, transforms the abject into the site of the Other." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 54. To put this in Lacanian terms, the maternal figure represents the fundamental fantasy, the satiated desire (demand) of the Imaginary where the *objet a* acts as the object cause of desire. The traumatized subject's rejection of the maternal figure is the rejection of the *objet a* which disrupts fantasy's function and causes the subject to turn toward a new object, not as object cause of desire, but as object cause of fear. This is why Kristeva argues that fear is the affective response to horror.

cause of fear, acts to consolidate the abjection into something signified and, therefore, tamable. The danger, of course, is that a named object of fear may quickly become the named target of aggression.

Kristeva uses Freud's famed case study of Little Hans to explain the interactions between fear, abjection, and aggression. For Little Hans, a verbose young child who loved to name and linguistically organize his surroundings, his fear was that he could *sense*, but could not *signify*. As such, Little Hans focused on the sounds of trade outside his window and declared that he was afraid of horses where "the phobia of horses becomes a *hieroglyph* that condenses *all fears*, from unnamable to namable."[184] Recognizing that Little Hans was repressing the paradoxical emotions of "sadistic aggressiveness towards the father and a tender passive attitude to him," Freud concluded that this defense mechanism (labeling his fear as horses) allowed Little Hans to alleviate the fear he had of his father.[185] Little Hans' fear was now "directed to a different object and expressed in a distorted form, so that the patient is afraid, not of being castrated by his father, but of being bitten by a horse."[186] For Kristeva, such attempts to name an object cause of fear are predictors for targeted aggression. Naming his phobia allowed Little Hans to deflect his fear of castration, but left the repressed emotion of aggression. She contends that Little Hans' "fear of being bitten" is actually a "fear of biting," that he will do harm, leading her to conclude that fear and violent aggression are coextensive: "Fear and the aggressivity intended to protect me from some not yet localizable cause are projected and come back to me from the outside: 'I am threatened.'"[187]

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[184] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 34. *Emphasis in original*.
[185] Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, Ltd., 1936), 20.
[186] Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, 39.
[187] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 39.

These interactions between trauma, aggression, and fear are what demarcate a subject traumatized by abjection, marked by fear, and prone to violence. In an abjected traumatic episode, it is not the mere failure of fantasy to protect the subject from the Real, but a failure that is replaced by *violent and fearful loathing*.[188] Kristeva argues,

> Out of the daze that has petrified him before the untouchable, impossible, absent body of the mother, a daze that has cut off his impulses from their objects, that is, from their representations, out of such daze he causes, along with loathing, one word to crop up – fear. … Put another way, it means that there are lives not sustained by *desire*, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on *exclusion* … articulated by *negation* and its modalities, *transgression, denial,* and *repudiation*.[189]

In the face of abjection, the void left by the subject's exclusion of the m(O)ther breaks down one's psychical defenses until the subject works-through the trauma.[190] A refusal or inability to work-through (what Kristeva refers to as sublimation) the trauma risks the complete subjugation of the traumatized subject to the abjected void.[191] In other words, a failure to work-through trauma risks a subject driven by abjection and vengeance.

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[188] Returning to our car crash example, the woman from the auto accident experienced a trauma, but not an abjected trauma, because she did not turn to thoughts of violence. Assume for a moment, however, that the woman had a passenger with her who died in the accident. If the woman blamed the other driver for the passenger's death and sought revenge through violence, that might mark the trauma as abjected.

[189] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 6. *Emphasis in original*.

[190] In this sense, the void of the individual subject is analogous to the state of exception in the social body. For the individual, a trauma that is not worked-through will continue to emerge as the return of the repressed. According to Agamben, leaders can allow social traumas to endlessly re-emerge as justification for their continued power. Just as the void breaks down the individual's defenses and allows the traumatic event to return time and again, the manipulative leader may break down society's defenses against tyranny by continually reminding the citizenry of a frightening trauma that created the state of exception to begin with. As Kristeva explains, abjection often "appears as a rite of defilement and pollution" and "persists as [an] *exclusion* or taboo." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 17. *Emphasis in original*.

[191] Some may argue that working-through and sublimation are not the same thing. While this is most likely true in a clinical sense, the two concepts are analogous in a larger, theoretical, context. An abjected trauma requires embracing an excess for sublimation, which is analogous to the vector of *jouissance* to castration in the Lacanian graph of desire. This is the Lacanian vector that functions to maintain the stability of the subject in the face of collapsing meaning via the Other, and is similar to Kristeva's demand that the wound be kept open – both accept limitations in the Symbolic register to maintain psychical stability for the subject. For Kristeva it means an acceptance of the open wound and, for Lacan, it means finding contentment in an inevitable lack. For more detail on the Lacanian vector, see Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject," 692-700.

Kristeva writes, “In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control.”[192] For Kristeva, working-through an abjected trauma requires one to “keep open the wound where he or she who enters into the analytic adventure is located.”[193] According to Tina Chanter, keeping open such a wound is “not a matter of hoping to eliminate abjection altogether, but rather a matter of tracing its effects, taking seriously its affect, and thinking about how it might be refigured or reshaped.”[194] For Thea Harrington, working-through abjected trauma “involves giving to language the memory of the loss that constitutes the subject’s being.”[195] Kristeva’s theorizations on horror can provide us a fuller understanding and more robust vocabulary in understanding how fear interacts with narrative and trauma. This will prove invaluable as we begin to engage the specific narratives that accompanied the trauma of Nine-Eleven and the Abu Ghraib scandal.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter I provided a psychoanalytic explanation of how humans form their identities and come to know themselves and their world: (1) humans makes sense of themselves and their world through narratives; (2) the way an individual understands the self is through the internalization of fantasy; and (3) the unraveling, failure, or dissolution of either constitutes a trauma. In so doing, I drew heavily from both the psychoanalytic and rhetorical traditions on subjectivity, seeking points of overlap primary in the concepts of narrative and fantasy.

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[192] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 11. In the context of a social body, a refusal to work-through an abjected trauma would result in a melancholic nation.
[193] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 27.
[194] Tina Chanter, "The Picture of Abjection: Thomas Vinterberg's 'The Celebration'," *parallax* 10 (2004): 32. EBSCOhost (12253050).
[195] Thea Harrington, "The Speaking Abject in Kristeva's 'Powers of Horror'," *Hypatia* 13 (1998): 153. EBSCOhost.

From the perspective of the individual, the subject is formed by the creation of personal fantasies that manifest themselves into contextualized narratives that create one's life-story. From a social perspective, these life-stories come together within a cultural scaffolding to assemble and articulate master narratives that provide preliminary answers to questions such as, "what does it mean to be an American?" When these stories begin to fail in their explanatory aims, however, the individual or social body is exposed to the failing of signification and experiences a trauma. At the individual level, a trauma is said to belatedly occur when an event refuses incorporation into the Symbolic register of a subject. At the social level, an event which disrupts the ability of a cultural master narrative to adequately explain the world to its citizenry can be called a national trauma. Given this theoretical understanding, we see that a subject does not become self-conscious until s/he is enfolded by culture – the self is an internalization of the external.

Kristeva's theorizations of horror and abjection add another layer of understanding in how traumatic episodes often play out. When the social body is traumatized, fear is the affective response to an imbalance in the drives. The attempt to recalibrate the drives occurs through an object of fantasy, which is always the unknown, or more specifically, the unnamable. An encounter with the Real, or with the abject, leads to an ultimate failure of symbolization, sparking primary repression and leading to a belated trauma and abjection for the subject through secondary repression and the collapse of the Symbolic register in the context of what is feared. This drive imbalance causes the subject to name the external object of fear in hopes of finding catharsis, which then risks aggression. According to Kristeva, the only way to work-through the trauma of abjection is to seek sublimation by standing in the face of horror to keep the wound open. For Kristeva, horror is an experience of fear; for me, horror is the rhetorical

manifestation of that experience.[196] In the next chapter, I will begin to examine how horror stories may contribute toward that end and the purpose they may serve in psychical working-through.

[196] This is not to say that I do not believe there are affective dimensions to horror, nor does it imply that I believe all horror resides in the Symbolic. This is only to say that I believe that horror is rhetorical – even when it resists signification.

Chapter 2

The Stories We Hear: Frame Genres and Rhetorical Criticism

In addition to understanding the world through our stories, humans often project their personal stories onto fictionalized stories about other people. Not only does this help us to stabilize issues of subjective identity; vicarious identification is pleasurable, which explains why so many people will give up their evenings to consume a television program or a film. Of course, after someone has made the decision that a movie is on the evening's agenda, one of the first questions he or she is likely to ask is, "how do I want to spend the next two hours?" If she wants to laugh, she will look for a comedy. If he wants to cry, he could hunt down a moving drama. If she wants to be energized, she might seek out an action film. That these distinctions in types of films exist is neither shocking nor arbitrary; humans often seek to categorize stories by common features, which we call a genre.[197] "Genre," a French word meaning "kind, sort, [or] style," was nativized into English in the mid-1800s but has been the center of academic discussion for literally

[197] The debate, of course, is what constitutes "common features," and is the issue that the first section of this chapter engages. As Victoria Lynn Schmidt notes, traditional literary genres were changed by the advent of film, which are now being challenged by the influence of video games and on and on. While the question of what stories might constitute a genre is still up in the air, it is unquestionable that humans attempt to create genres through categorization. See Victoria Lynn Schmidt, *Story Structure Architect: A Writer's Guide to Building Dramatic Situations & Compelling Characters* (Georgetown: Fraser Direct, 2005). For many scholars, in fact, the desire to categorize goes beyond our stories of entertainment and infiltrates the way we understand the world *in toto*. For example, James C. Mancuso argues that humans narrativize everything in their lives and categorize these narratives according to what he terms a "story grammar." He contends that, "early in life most humans can use a well-developed psychollage by which they can categorize text as *story* … [and] the psychollages used to construe inputs from that text must fit appropriately into the canonical grammar slots of a narrative episode – *setting, initiating events, consequences,* etc." James C. Mancuso, "Discussing Nonconscious Processes Involved in Autobiography," in *Considering Counter Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense*, eds. Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), 308. *Emphasis in original*. And it is this debate, what does one do with "genre" beyond the construction of a taxonomy, that will take up the rest of this chapter.

thousands of years.[198] By contrast, most scholars consider the horror genre itself to be relatively young, born out of the supernatural gothic tradition and coming to fruition in the early 1800s with stories such as Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819).[199]

In the previous chapter, I explained the importance of fantasy and stories for how humans come to know their world and the impact that trauma can have on grander master narratives and individual fantasies alike. In this chapter, I will begin a larger investigation of the patterns that can emerge between stories and how current scholars approach such investigations. First, I will examine genre theory and criticism as it is understood in literature, film studies, and rhetorical studies. Second, I will detail the horror genre as it manifests itself in cinema and analyze how rhetorical studies currently approach horror films as rhetorical artifacts. Finally, I will explain how I deploy "frame genre criticism" as a hybridized method of rhetorical analysis in subsequent chapters.

UNDERSTANDING GENRE STUDIES

Although the concept of genre and genre studies can be found in nearly every field of the humanities from literature to linguistic anthropology to phenomenological sociology to the pedagogy of teaching composition to non-native speakers, there is little consensus in either the understanding of "genre" as a term or what constitutes "genre studies" in any of these fields.[200] Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff argue that,

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198 "Genre," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed May 17, 2011, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=genre.

199 While there is some disagreement regarding which stories are horror and which are supernatural gothic, most scholars seem to agree that the two genres are distinct and that the two literary works mentioned are the bridge that connects them. For example, see Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*.

200 Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior, "Participating in Emergent Socio-Literate Worlds: Genre, Disciplinarity, Interdisciplinarity," in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Literacy Research, Second Edition*, eds. Richard Beach, et al. (New York: Hampton Press, 2005). As further evidence, Barry Pennock argues that the term "genre" is a contentious one even *within* the field of sociolinguistics. And although he may be successful in his endeavor to prove that "the linguistic study of genre overlaps considerably with other

"despite the wealth of genre scholarship over the last thirty years, the term *genre* itself remains fraught with confusion, competing with popular theories of genre as a text type and as an artificial system of classification."[201] Even so, in rhetorical and literature studies, or what we might term the critical humanities, there is general agreement that genre studies is a form of *criticism* that examines patterns in similar artifacts. Three artifacts dominate the genre literature in the humanities: literature, film, and oratory. Although I will ultimately diverge from the interpretations these disciplines traditionally assign to genre studies, advancing an alternative notion of genre criticism particular to this study, it would be beneficial to first explain the prevailing approaches in an effort to better explain my approach.

Genre studies in literature

According to Bawarshi and Reiff, the traditional approaches to genre studies in literature separate into two approaches: the neoclassical and the structuralist. The neoclassical approach works deductively with a set of *a priori* categories whereby the critic works to classify and separate texts into given taxonomies. According to Gérard Genette, the neoclassical categories are split into an "illustrious triad" of the lyrical, epical, and dramatic. He explains how – from Aristotle and Plato up through the German romantics – there was great effort to define and re-define generic categories, but that they were always some derivative product of the initial triad.[202] Bawarshi and Reiff argue that

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disciplines such as sociolinguistics" (I'm in no position to argue otherwise), his explanation of why that overlap exists (that "field, mode, and tenor all influence the language we use in a particular context of situation, but not to the extend that they dictate the exact surface forms used") serves to prove that the way genre is viewed in sociolinguistics is very different from the way it is viewed in rhetorical studies. Barry Pennock, *A Genre Approach to Re-entry Patters in Editorials*, ed. Francisco Fernandez (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2000), 10-11.

[201] Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, ed. Charles Bazerman (West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2010), 3.

[202] Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). For a quick snapshot of Genette's argument, he refers to the "illustrious triad"

all neoclassical approaches seek "systematic and inclusive rules based on universal validity for classifying and describing kinds of literary texts."[203] They contrast this with the structuralist approach, which works inductively from a set of texts and is "more concerned with how socio-historically localized genres shape specific literary actions, identifications, and representations."[204] The structuralist approach looks for patterns in how meaning is created between the author and reader through the text. As Lois Tyson explains, "structuralism isn't interested in what a text means, but in *how* a text means what it means. … [T]he final goal of structuralism is to understand the underlying structure of human experience, which exists at the level of *langue*" or abstract codes that preexist a given text.[205]

Complicating this binary between a neoclassical and structuralist approach, however, is the work of Northrop Frye. Bawarshi and Reiff place him in the neoclassical camp, however, although Frye does create four *a priori* categories in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, it would be unfair to say that his sole goal was singularly taxonomic.[206] For Frye, the purpose of genre criticism is not simple categorization, but a categorization that could help the critic see previously unrecognized patterns among literary works and assist the critic in understanding. A critic who applies his or her own standards of validity to a text can never truly apprehend the artifact, much less draw academic insights from it. Frye writes that, "a great romancer should be examined in terms of the conventions he

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starting on page 7, actually breaks it down into the three categories on page 35, and shows how the German romantic scholars created an elegantly complicated taxonomy based on the triad on page 54.

[203] Bawarshi and Reiff, *Genre: An Introduction*, 16.

[204] Bawarshi and Reiff, *Genre: An Introduction*, 18.

[205] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 220. *Emphasis in original*.

[206] Frye's categories are based on what he believes to be the four overriding archetypes: comedy, romance, tragedy, and satire / irony. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[sic] chose. [Poet and romance writer] William Morris should not be left on the side lines of prose fiction merely because the critic has not learned to take the romance form seriously."[207] Ralph Cohen contends that Frye was keenly aware that classification alone was an insufficient academic endeavor:

> Contemporary critics do not find classification to be the purpose of genres, nor do they find that classifications serve evaluative purposes. When Northrop Frye sets up the four genres based on the radical of presentation, he returns to the view that genres are rhetorical "in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his [sic] public."[208]

For Frye, the critic who refused to understand both the style of a given genre and the dynamic persuasive character of genre in general might find a variety of interesting texts unworthy of critical analysis. Although there are some aspects of Frye's work that are unquestionably neoclassical (as Bawarshi and Reiff define it), his overall project was much more nuanced and dynamic, suggesting that understanding genre criticism as either neoclassical or structuralist is a problem.

Rather than classifying traditional genre criticism as neoclassical or structuralist, Fredric Jameson contrasts Frye's work with Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* to create a different categorization for traditional approaches to genre studies. Jameson argues we should understand traditional genre criticism as either a *semantic* or *syntactic* approach. With the semantic approach, for which Frye acts as his touchstone, the critic hopes to understand what the text or genre *means* by understanding its "spirit," "which is something like the generalized existential experience behind the individual texts."[209] With the syntactic approach, the critic hopes to "analyze the mechanisms and

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[207] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 304.
[208] Ralph Cohen, "History and Genre," *Neohelicon* 13 (1986): 207.
[209] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 94.

structure of a genre … to determine its laws and its limits."[210] Ultimately, however, Jameson finds his own binary just as dissatisfying as the neoclassical / Structuralism approach, wondering if genre criticism itself has been "thoroughly discredited by modern literary theory and practice."[211] He concludes that "as texts free themselves more and more from an immediate performative situation, it becomes ever more difficult to enforce a given generic rule."[212] Jameson hopes to reconcile this problem with a de-positivizing approach that embraces the dialectic between the two mutually exclusive approaches. He writes,

> Every universalizing approach, whether the phenomenological or the semiotic, will from the dialectical point of view be found to conceal its own contradictions and repress its own historicity by strategically framing its perspective so as to omit the negative, absence, contradiction, repression, the *non-dit*, or the *impensé*. To restore the latter requires that abrupt and paradoxical dialectical restructuration of the basic problematic which has often seemed to be the most characteristic gesture and style of dialectical method in general, keeping the terms but standing the problem on its head.[213]

For Jameson, this dialectic is the negotiation between what a text "means" and how that meaning came to be culturally identified. Readers bring with them multiple assumptions, many of which are based in expectations derived from culture's common genres. For Jameson, this creates what he calls a "social contract" between the author and reader. Tzvetan Todorov terms this contract the "horizon of expectations," where "authors write in function of (which does not mean in agreement with) the existing generic system" and "readers read in function of the generic system, with which they are familiar thanks to

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[210] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 94. By using Propp as his touchstone for the syntactic approach, Jameson seems to be conflating structuralism with formalism, at least in terms of genre studies. While I think this is unfair, it does illustrate that genre criticism in literary studies was most certainly influenced by the theories of Russian formalism and the New Critics as well.

[211] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 93.

[212] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 93.

[213] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 96.

criticism, schools, the book distribution system, or simply hearsay."[214] Jameson's dialectical approach understands that there are not two "pure" approaches in Neoclassicism and Structuralism, nor are there two competing goals in the semantic and syntactic that he offers. Criticism is done as a dialectic endeavor, seeking a synthesis that may better explain the world.

The world that Jameson opens to us, however, is not just a definitional one, but one populated by a larger issue that continues to plague genre studies and one that may be antithetical to the very notion of genre: the challenge of poststructuralism.[215] For example, Jacques Derrida takes genre on directly: it doesn't matter if the critical goal is "textual meaning through categorization" or "mechanistic understanding via criticism," because both are limited as human constructs. For him, the concept of a social contract or horizon of expectations is problematic because there is nothing beyond the text; it is impossible to create a "genre of genre." He writes,

> it comes as no surprise that, in nature and art, genre, a concept that is essentially classificatory and genealogico-taxonomic, itself engenders so many classificatory vertigines when it goes about classifying itself and situating the classificatory principle or instrument within a set. As with the class itself, the principle of genre is unclassifiable; it tolls the knell of the knell (*glas*), in other words, of classicum, of what permits one to call out (*Calare*) orders and to order the manifold within a nomenclature. … [T]his meditation acts as an absolute prerequisite without which any historical perspectivizing will always be difficult to legitimate.[216]

Genre can never be a natural category because it will never include itself in a set and is always-already ahistorical; from Derrida's perspective, however, genre studies paradoxically assumes a determinate category for artifacts. For him, one can never

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[214] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18-19.

[215] The terms "poststructuralism" is a fiercely debated one, but, for the moment, allow me to characterize it as a critical approach that questions any assumption of essence. This was a strong challenge to the way that genre was conceptualized in modernity.

[216] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 61.

assume that there is a categorization of artifacts or even that selected artifacts share common characteristics, and the structuralist assumptions behind genre criticism doom it from the outset regardless of how it is practiced or the dialectical accommodations provided by Jameson. It will always be incomplete and imperfect.

Although it may be seen as side-stepping the issue to Derrida, many scholars find moves like Jameson's dialectic to be a sufficient accommodation to the poststructuralist criticism. In what some are calling the "rhetorical turn" in literary studies, defenders of genre criticism argue that the concept of genre is not a definition but an action.[217] Amy J. Devitt writes, "What is new about this renewed turn toward genre is the study of genre as action rather than form, as a text-type that *does* something rather than *is* something."[218] In this way, the very act of genre criticism can be conceived of as a process. Ralph Cohen argues that "genre groupings arise, change and decline for historical reasons. And since each genre is composed of texts that accrue, the grouping is a process, not a determinate category. Genres are open categories."[219] Cohen recognizes that genres are human constructs, but, contrary to Derrida's assumptions, it *is the shifting artifact* that makes the critical endeavor worthwhile. He writes,

> Genres are open systems; they are groupings of texts by critics to fulfill certain ends. And each genre is related to and defined by others to which it is related. Such relations changed based on internal contradiction, expansion, interweaving. Members of a genre need not have a single trait in common since to do so would presuppose that the trait has the same function for each of the member texts. Rather the members of a generic classification have multiple relational possibilities with each other; relationships that are discovered only in the process of adding members to a class. Thus the claim that genre study should be

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[217] Interestingly, this "rhetorical turn" in literary studies is not how those in rhetorical studies argue genre criticism should be done. My argument is that rhetorical scholars should take note of these changes, return to their rhetorical roots, and take the lead in re-claiming the value of genre studies.

[218] Amy J. Devitt, "Genre, Genres, and the Teaching of Genre," *College Composition and Communication* 47 (1996): 606.

[219] Cohen, "History and Genre," 88.

> abandoned because members of a genre do not share a single trait or traits can be seen not as undermining genre but as offering an argument for its study.[220]

Even going back to the ancient Greeks, Genette argues, the endless cycle of (re)creating artificial categories assists the critic in looking for larger lessons, which includes an engagement with Derrida's criticisms. He writes, "the whole endlessly forming and re-forming poetics, whose object, let us firmly state, *is not the text, but the architext* – [can] help us explore that architextual, or architextural, transcendence. Or, more modestly, navigate in it."[221]

Finally, for many scholars, even conceding to Derrida the full weight of his argument – that communication is imperfect, that language is never universal, and, as such, genre will never be a "complete" explanation – does not deny the utility of studying provisional categories. Poststructuralist insights should serve to remind critics that their conclusions are always-already stained by the imperfections of language, but they should not lead one to assume that all criticism is irrelevant.[222] Peeking ahead to what rhetorical studies teaches us, we would be well-served to remember that regardless of its futility, humans *do* attempt to communicate with one another as the great "symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal," and *that* is worthy of study.[223] As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell concludes, "If criticism is to fulfill its functions, the rhetorical critic must

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[220] Cohen, "History and Genre," 95-96.
[221] Genette, *The Architext*, 84.
[222] To be fair, Derrida does not dismiss all acts of criticism, but does seem skeptical of the way it has been traditionally performed. For example, he argues that "the literary character of the text is inscribed on the side of the intentional object, in its noematic structure, one could say, and not only on the subjective side of the noetic act. There are 'in' the text features which call for the literary reading and recall the convention, institution, or history of literature." Jacques Derrida, "Introduction: Deconstruction, Critical Thought, Literature," in *Jacques Derrida: Critical Thought*, ed. Ian Maclachlan (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 8. For Derrida, criticism can't be performed by looking at a literary line in isolation, but has to be examined as a part of a larger institution (in this case, literature as institution). What Derrida asks of us is to take a more provisional approach to the study of genre, which I hope to do in this project.
[223] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 6.

proclaim, 'Nothing that is human symbolization is alien to me.'"[224] The legacy of poststructuralism illustrates the limitations of genre criticism, but does not dismiss it; it does, however, force us to take seriously the final charge against genre studies, that such inquiry ignores the complexity of rhetorical action and makes critical insights suspect.

The history of genre criticism in literary studies is long, complicated and robust and it would be foolhardy to attempt a comprehensive summary here, especially when this project never claims to be an exercise in literary studies. This gloss is provided to illustrate some of the larger debates surrounding the notion of genre criticism and to provide an overall context for the critical methodology this project employed in the case studies to follow. Because my examples are cinematic in character, we also need to engage briefly how genre has been considered in film studies.

Genre studies in film

Since Thomas Edison first began public presentations of motion pictures in 1894 with the Kinetoscope, academics struggled to determine where they should position themselves in relation to this new technology. Although it failed to guide the direction of film studies, Vachel Lindsay, in one of the first academic discussions of film, argued that critics should "classify and judge the current films" to "supply a way of approach to the moving picture field."[225] While Lindsay attempted to construct genre categories that were analogous to other forms of artistic expression (e.g. Impressionism), the contemporary understanding of genre is the "standardization of the film product. The audience has some idea what to expect from a comedy or a Western, just as consumers

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[224] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Criticism Ephemeral and Enduring," *Speech Teacher* 23 (1974): 14. EBSCOhost (9575197).

[225] Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1916), 1. Lindsay's reference of "field" here is in reference to the film industry, and if there is a dominant theme to genre film studies, it has been toward commercialism.

know what to expect when they order a specific kind of sausage."[226] Similar to Todorov's "horizon of expectations," Thomas Schatz has argued that genre exists as an implicit "contract between filmmakers and audience [where] the genre film is an actual event that honors such a contract."[227] This contract makes film genres both static, in that they fulfill certain expectations an audience holds, and dynamic, in that these expectations can morph over time to keep the movie viewing experience fresh.[228]

According to Barry Keith Grant, the first significant essays on genre appeared in the 1950s, though were quickly overshadowed by the rising popularity of *auteur* theory. Even so, these early essays served to set the stage for the topics that would come to characterize genre criticism in film studies: spectatorship, the structure of myth, and verisimilitude.[229] Although film studies focused primarily on the *auteur* through the late 1960s, influential essays such as Lev Vladimir Kuleshov's "The Art of Cinema" and the rise of New Criticism and Russian formalism began to plant the seeds of change.[230] Those seeds bore fruit in 1968 when Christian Metz' book, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, pushed structuralist theory into the forefront of film studies.[231] At the beginning of the 1970s, the burgeoning structuralist project had taken hold in genre studies and "critical interest shifted from the signified of films to the practice of

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[226] Eileen Bower, "The Genre Film," in *History of the American Cinema*, ed. Charles Harpole (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 167.
[227] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 16.
[228] Thomas Schatz, "Film Genre and the Genre Film," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[229] Barry Keith Grant, "Introduction," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
[230] Lev Vladimir Kuleshov, "Art of the Cinema," in *Kuleshov on Film: Writings of Lev Kuleshov*, ed. Ronald Levaco, trans. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).
[231] Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

signification, from what a film 'means' to how it produces meaning."[232] As the decade moved forward, this structuralism merged with an increasing interest in ideology and produced a critical desire to identify "genres with distinctive patterns of narrative order and visual iconography. Regulation (by establishing norms), classification (by constructing typographies), and explanation (by providing formal description) were the hallmarks of this era."[233]

While the 1980s and 1990s saw genre criticism falling out of style in literary circles, it was holding steady in film studies. Many critics saw the utility of a larger, patterned, corpus of artifacts, and genre acted as a nice complement to the critical inquiries (e.g. class, race, gender) that dominated the academic discussions. Theorists such as Janet Staiger accommodated emerging poststructuralist challenges (e.g. that genre criticism was overly determinant or that certain readings of film sets attempted to "know" the spectator) with acknowledgements that "pure" categories don't exist and many genres have a hybrid nature. She argued that, "the ways to create genre categories are multiple. … [N]o justification exists to assume [anyone sees] films as being 'purely' one type."[234] For most critics who incorporated other theories to inform their generic readings, there was an understanding that the power of genre criticism was derived from the recognition of, and inquiry into, the interaction between the cinematic and the social. Films are not texts alone but reflections of, and active participants in, the production of cultural experiences. Film genres can be "a form of collective cultural expression that enables the dramatization of the common values and fundamental cultural oppositions that structure a

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[232] Grant, "Introduction," xvii.
[233] Nick Browne, "Preface," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xi.
[234] Janet Staiger, "Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 194.

society."[235] Further, critical analysis of the constellations created between texts generates additional meaning in that genre is woven into the social. Lois and Robert Self contend that, "the repetition of popular forms in the movies constitutes part of the cultural rituals whereby society communicates basic value structures to its individual members."[236] Thus, the examination of genre is worthwhile insomuch as any rhetorical examination beyond the text is worthwhile, which was a popular critical position during the 1980s and 1990s.

While genre criticism in film studies often looked beyond the text, for critics like Schatz, the consideration of genre was always tied to the commercial interests of the production company. Early analysis of film genre was done through a filter of the hegemonic Hollywood studio system, and later scholarship was haunted by the structural demands concretized by the industry. For many, this either limits what genre studies can offer to the academic conversation, or leads us down the road well-traveled: the accusation that genre studies is simply an exercise in taxonomy. Alan Williams, for example, has argued against the value of genre criticism because the studio system has already prefigured the corpus of films worthy of consideration prior to academic inquiry.[237] Similarly, for Rick Altman, it is the *exclusion* of films deemed worthy of study that contaminates the potential for criticism; even if the existing taxonomy is never codified, it still informally exists. He writes, "This *exclusive* list of films generally occurs not in a dictionary context, but instead in connection with attempts to arrive at the

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[235] Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre*, trans. Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 79.
[236] Lois Self and Robert Self, "Adaptation as Rhetorical Process: "It Happened One Night" and "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town"," *Film Criticism* 5 (1980): 58. EBSCOhost (31316450).
[237] Alan Williams, "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?," *Quarterly Review of Films* 9 (1984): 121-125.

overall meaning or structure of a genre."[238] The danger is, of course, that if the genre critic spends all of his or her time creating and defending the corpus, genre studies again becomes simply an exercise in categorization. For Steve Neale, such an endeavor is "inherently reductive," where one could "easily end up identifying the purpose of generic analysis with the rather fruitless attempt to decide which films fit, and therefore properly belong to, which genres."[239]

When engaging this accusation of taxonomic reductionism, genre critics in film studies make the same "rhetorical turn" Devitt and Cohen deployed in their defense of genre in literary studies. The creation of genres and the act of genre criticism is, "above all … a *process* rather than a fact, and one in which different perspectives, needs and interests can and do deliver widely varying outcomes."[240] There is no absolute when it comes to genre, either in interpretation or even categorization; what the process of genre criticism provides us is a vocabulary to describe the interactions between text, audience, producer, and critic. Barry Langford concludes that, even with the problems inherent in genre studies, it "remains an essential critical tool for understanding the ways that films are produced and consumed, as well as their broader relations to culture and society."[241] Unlike their counterparts in literary studies, however, genre critics in film studies were not overly concerned with being viewed as list-makers. One of the reasons for this may be that, by the time genre criticism gained academic acceptance in the field, critics were

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[238] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 217. In this context, Altman is speaking about the impact pre-determining generic categories can have on multi-methodological approaches, specifically semiotics. These concerns are especially important for this project as it is hoped that the merging of psychoanalytic theory with genre criticism will overcome many of these concerns. *Emphasis in original.*

[239] Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre," *Screen* 31 (1990): 51.

[240] Barry Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Manchester: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 5.

[241] Langford, *Film Genre*, vii.

either too busy engaging the poststructuralists or had just been swept up in the critical turn.

Although the "studio system" largely disappeared after World War II, even today most major releases are still choreographed by a relatively homogenous set of studios. Realizing this, many film scholars who were still interested in genre at the turn of the present century chased the Schatz legacy to its logical conclusion, reducing genre studies to the study of "genre films," studio produced movies that exist only as profitable exemplars of generic formulas. This is not to say that there aren't lessons to be gleaned from such an approach; as Wheeler W. Dixon notes, "with genre filmmaking, as always, constituting the bulk of film production, and with the pervasiveness of mainstream cinema at an all-time intensity, more than ever it behooves us to understand precisely how contemporary genre cinema shapes and mirrors our collective dreams and desires."[242] And with horror being one of the most enduring and profitable genres in cinema, it is a veritable goldmine for academic inquiry even limited to the commercial domain. Before I look at the horror genre specifically, however, there is one more domain of genre studies I need to discuss because, of course, this study is centered there: genre in rhetorical studies.

Genre studies in rhetoric

The concept of genre in rhetorical studies can be traced back as far as antiquity. In *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle differentiates and separates speeches into the categories of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic, which is widely described as a genre typology.[243] In the following centuries, however, genre criticism became sequestered in literary

[242] Wheeler Winson Dixon, "Introduction: The New Genre Cinema," in *Film Genres 2000: New Critical Essays*, ed. Wheeler W. Dixon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 11.
[243] Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, trans. Lane Cooper (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1932).

studies and was largely ignored by rhetoricians until Herbert A. Wichelns penned a landmark essay published at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the first modern attempt to differentiate rhetorical criticism from literary criticism, Wichelns wrote that, "the point of view of literary criticism is proper only to its own objects, the permanent works. … But the rhetorical inquiry … permeates and governs all subsequent interpretation and criticism."[244] Using what many would consider a generic approach for determining appropriate artifacts of study, Wichelns argued that literary criticism was confined to works that would transcend history and have a lasting artistic comment on the world, but rhetorical criticism lay "at the boundary of politics (in the broadest sense) and literature. … It includes the work of the speaker, of the pamphleteer, of the writer of editorials, and of the sermon maker. It is to be thought of as the art of popularization."[245] Although he limited most of his discussion on rhetorical criticism to oratory (speeches), Wichelns also expanded the generic corpus available for criticism to what could be considered part of the popular culture. The common characteristic was that all of these artifacts were contextual to the time and place of their creation.

Although Wichelns has long been considered a formative scholar in rhetorical studies, his comments on genre went virtually unnoticed until Edwin Black's 1965 book covering the methodology of rhetorical criticism. Is his discussion of Wichelns and the dominance of neo-Aristotelian criticism, Black notes that not only did Aristotle leave virtually no written records of rhetorical criticism as an example to follow, but that modern speech contained "the existence of a genre of rhetorical discourse that … is

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[244] Herbert A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking*, ed. Alexander Magnus Drummond (New York: The Century Co., 1925), 211-212.
[245] Wichelns, "Literary Criticism," 213-214.

outside the scope of neo-Aristotelian criticism."[246] Black's observations regarding the limitations of criticism and his chapter on argumentation as a unique genre represent one of the first attempts to recognize genre not only recommending its own methodology, but one that provided unique critical insights. Just four years later, Kenneth Burke would remark that all of rhetoric was rooted in genre. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he contends, "You can't possibly make a statement without its falling into some sort of pattern. Its formality can then be abstracted and named[.] … Given enough industry in observation, abstraction and classification, you can reduce any expression … to some underlying skeletal structure."[247] And in 1978, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson published what many consider to be the defining essay on genre criticism in rhetorical studies. They contend that a genre is a unique rhetorical form of multiple artifacts that come together to create what they term a *constellation of meaning*. "What is distinctive about the acts in a genre," they note "is the recurrence of the forms *together* in constellation."[248]

Over time, scholars of rhetorical studies have taken these insights and formalized them into a methodology of genre (or generic) criticism, developed on the assumption that particular social situations demand specific rhetorical responses, and that these responses share common characteristics in such a way that they can be categorized. In

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[246] Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 147.

[247] Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 65. These insights from Burke are expanded by other scholars who contend that there is a social element to generic patterns as well. For Lloyd Bitzer, discourse becomes patterned because rhetoric is a response to a cultural situation. He writes, "rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation … so compelling and clear that the responses were created almost out of necessity. Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 9. Several years later, Ernest Bormann echoed this idea of cultural genre by arguing that, "there are recurring patterns of mythic dimensions common to a given culture's rhetoric." Ernest G. Bormann, "Fetching Good Out of Evil: A Rhetorical Use of Calamity," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 63 (1977): 131. EBSCOhost (9492468).

[248] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt (State College: Strata Publishing, Inc., 2005), 408. *Emphasis in original*.

their chapter on the method of analyzing "form" in rhetorical texts, Roderick P. Hart and Suzanne Daughton contend, "genres exist because rhetors are imitative, borrowing from yesterday when deciding what to say today."[249] In her book surveying the methodologies of rhetorical criticism, Sonja K. Foss writes that, "the generic critic seeks to discover commonalities in rhetorical patterns across recurring situations."[250] Although Hart and Daughton and Foss focus on creating a taxonomy in genre criticism, genre critics themselves struggled in their efforts to appropriately balance categorization and evaluation. And in one of the first examples of genre criticism in the field, B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel examine the characteristics of apologia speech, but note that this "act is not, in and of itself, criticism, just as the categorizing of strategies into factors does not complete the critical act. Such classification taken alone lacks an evaluative dimension."[251] Although Ware and Linkugel were clear that they were not engaged in genre *criticism*, but rather genre *categorization*, their work became foundational in not only how rhetorical studies understood genre criticism, but how it was to be deployed. Their "categorization without evaluation" criteria served as the guiding principle in the vast majority of essays that appeared utilizing "genre criticism" as their espoused methodology.[252] Ironically, as genre critics in other disciplines were doing their best to

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[249] Roderick P. Hart and Suzanne Daughton, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, Third ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 104.

[250] Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*, Second ed. (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc., 1996), 225.

[251] B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 283. EBSCOhost (9376296).

[252] In 1978, Harrell and Linkugel attempt to outline their vision of genre criticism as methodology. They argue that the process is split into three actions: generic description, generic participation, and generic application. Generic description is the process of describing the characteristics of a particular genre. Generic participation is the categorization of speeches into distinct genres based on the criteria established, but does not constitute criticism itself. Generic application is the actual criticism, the structure of which is highly prescriptive. Harrell and Linkugel's goal for genre criticism was to give rhetorical criticism the flavor of science, where the findings of one rhetorical critic could (and should) be replicated by other critics who applied the same prescriptive criteria. They contend, "If one researcher is to be able to investigate the 'same' genre that another scholar has detailed, it seems imperative that he [sic] be able to identify the genre

distance themselves from accusations of categorization, rhetorical critics from the 1980s forward embraced those efforts.

In 1980, Walter Fisher outlined the focus of genre criticism in political discourse through the 1970s.[253] He noted that five essays appeared that dealt with acceptance and nominating address, 12 on apologia, six on campaign communication, seven on ceremonial address, and 13 on miscellaneous political speech.[254] In virtually all of the essays Fisher cites, the primary goal was to identify and categorize what constituted a particular type of political speech. In recent years, most essays trading in genre have sought to update these older categorizations and illustrate changes that have occurred in the generic conventions.[255] For example, Elizabeth Dudash argues that Barack Obama's inaugural address illustrated a shift in the expectations of the genre: "Since the rhetorical situation is based on the audience and the audience has changed with increased media and global issues in the twentieth and twenty first century, the inaugural has adapted."[256] In addition, a handful of essays have hoped to add new genres to the scholarly discussion. For example, Mary Stuckey contends that the rhetoric of succession is a particular genre in presidential discourse because "presidents who inherit the office from a member of

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in the same way as his colleague." Jackson Harrell and Wil A. Linkugel, "On Rhetorical Genre: An Organizing Perspective," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 11 (1978): 278. EBSCOhost (16177677). While this approach does allow for criticism over pure categorization, it is still heavily reliant on creating and maintaining categories, which is what the vast majority of self-proclaimed "genre criticisms" in rhetorical studies continued to do.

[253] During this time, rhetorical studies was still primarily focused on speeches and virtually all discussions of genre in the field were limited to political speeches.

[254] Walter R. Fisher, "Genre: Concepts and Applications in Rhetorical Criticism," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 44 (1980): 296-298. EBSCOhost (15739072).

[255] I considered an essay to be "updating" an existing genre category if that category appeared on Fisher's original 1980 list. For an example of updating inaugural addresses, see Lee Sigelman, "Presidential Inaugurals: The Modernization of a Genre," *Political Communication* 13 (1996): 81-92. EBSCOhost (16330736). For an example of updating apologia, see Sharon D. Downey, "The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (1993): 42-64. EBSCOhost (15777371).

[256] Elizabeth Dudash, "International Appeal in the Presidential Inaugural: An Update on Genre and an Expansion of Argument," *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* 28 (2007): 48. EBSCOhost (40305089).

their own party, especially if they have served in the administration of their predecessor, face a unique set of challenges and opportunities for leadership."[257] Even with these new developments over the past several decades, however, genre criticism appears tethered to a method of categorization.

Based on the prescribed methodology and the approach taken by those who claim to be performing genre criticism, many rhetorical scholars have become dismissive and we see many of the same debates from literary and film studies emerge in rhetorical studies as well. For example, Halford Ryan contends that the validity of genre criticism is suspect because the method itself predetermines what the critic will find. Looking specifically at what many consider to be the crown jewel of genre studies, the inaugural address, Ryan argues that missing elements in inaugurals by Harding, Wilson, FDR and others "casts doubts on the validity and reliability of a generic theory."[258] For him, the genre critic will downplay or ignore inconsistencies between artifacts and emphasize their similarities to ensure an academically accepted reading. Ryan's criticism is distinct from the similar warnings we found in the film studies literature. In film studies, the concern was that an overly powerful studio system had already prefigured not only the generic categories, but the representative artifacts of those categories worthy of study. In rhetorical studies, however, the criticism seems to be leveled more at the critic than an external force and, as such, is more an indictment of bad scholarship than an inherent problem with the methodology itself. The good critic must always be cognizant that rhetoric is contextual and dynamic; in fact, one of the espoused strengths of genre criticism is that it requires a recognition of context. As Campbell and Jamieson note, a

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[257] Mary Stuckey, "Legitimating Leadership: The Rhetoric of Succession as a Genre of Presidential Discourse," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 22 (1992): 25. EBSCOhost (16252225).
[258] Halford Ryan, "Introduction," in *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993), xvii.

conscientious genre critic should refuse the temptation of speeches that fit into neat categories and recognize that many artifacts will draw on the strengths of multiple genres. They argue, "a generic critic recognizes the combination of recurrent elements that forms a hybrid, but … such a critic can [also] perceive the unique fusion that is a response to the idiosyncratic needs of a particular situation, institution, and rhetor."[259] Further, as times change, so does the contemporary rhetoric and, consequently, the generic conventions. For example, recent scholarship illustrates that what was integral to an inaugural speech in the twentieth century is not necessarily a component of modern inaugural address; similarly, new aspects may be added to the genre that addresses the changing times. To argue that genre criticism is deterministic seems to presuppose a lazy scholar content to willfully ignore the evolution of genres and persuasion strategies.

And, of course, many have taken aim at genre criticism as an exercise in mere categorization. What differentiates this complaint from its counterpart in literary and film studies is that the rhetorician fears that a focus on genre may trade off with more socially productive and responsible forms of criticism. In Martha Solomon's review of Simons and Aghazarian's collection *Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse*, she concludes that just because "works are 'amenable' to generic analysis does not mean that such an approach is the most productive."[260] Thomas Conley concurs, arguing that genre criticism encourages a flattening out of the text and a refusal to look deeper at the rhetorical effects. He contends "To see objectively in the way [Campbell, Jamieson, and Bormann] want is to see at a distance; and to see at a distance is not to see very well. … It

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[259] Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Rhetorical Hybrids: Fusions of Generic Elements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 157. EBSCOhost (9503170).
[260] Martha Solomon, "Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse (Book)," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988): 107. EBSCOhost (9650303).

is, in short, to sacrifice perception for the sake of conception."[261] Although this seems to be a fair criticism of the way genre criticism was practiced initially by rhetorical critics (in the 1980s), it begs the question if this is the way it has to be or is currently practiced by contemporary proponents. Campbell and Jamieson argued, for example, that the responsibility of the genre critic was to take "a *generic perspective* toward criticism, not a crusading search to find genres."[262] For Carolyn Miller, good genre criticism is not an exercise in categorization, but a form of social activism. She argues that "what we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms … [but] we learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potentials for failure and success in acting together."[263] Just because the essays that claim to be genre criticism are exercises in categorization doesn't mean that they *have to be*.

So far, in this chapter I have briefly sketched the history of genre criticism in literature, film studies, and rhetorical studies. In literature, the traditional approach to genre was to separate classic works into taxonomies. Over time, scholars began to look beyond these exercises of categorization, however, and engaged in criticism from within the genres themselves. Today, questions of genre in literature are often surrounded by the larger poststructuralism debate and the overall value of criticism. For decades, film studies focused on genre as it related to the studio system and the "contract" between the filmmaker and audience to fulfill genre expectations. The critical turn in film studies opened genre criticism to larger questions as to the place of cinema in co-creating cultural experiences. In rhetorical studies, genre critics have historically focused on form within

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[261] Thomas Conley, "Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action," *Communication Quarterly* 26 (1978): 74. EBSCOhost (18586846).
[262] Campbell and Jamieson, "Form and Genre," 413. *Emphasis in the original*.
[263] Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 165. EBSCOhost (13147541).

texts that create a constellation of meaning. As with both literature and film studies, there was a fear that genre studies would limit itself to a mere creation of a taxonomy, which has limited the use of genre criticism. In the next section, I will look at how rhetorical studies has engaged horror films; it will become quickly clear that none of the essays discussed will claim to be performing genre criticism even though many endeavor to fulfill the spirit of such criticism as outlined its defenders.

UNDERSTANDING THE HORROR GENRE

When looked at in its totality, the horror genre engages a variety of different issues depending on the medium; moreover, as soon as the genre was identified in literature and film, the proliferation of the sub-genre makes generalization about horror even more difficult (e.g., one cannot assume the themes that appear in gothic literature are the same themes that appear in a slasher film). As this project investigates the generic patterns in filmic artifacts, however, my focus will be towards the horror genre as it is represented in the cinematic medium.[264] According to Jason Davis, the horror film is bound only by what scares its audience in a given time and place.[265] It is this simple limitation that allows the horror film to enjoy unprecedented popularity and resilience throughout its history in American cinema. By its very nature, the horror film is allowed to quickly and constantly evolve, shaping itself to the whims and fancies of an ever more fickle audience. The horror film can be whatever it wants to be – as long as it scares. As James Ursini notes, "the horror film genre has outstripped all the other major genres in its ability to rise from the grave after being pronounced dead by countless critics in generation after generation. … [T]he horror genre thrives on the enthusiasm of each new

[264] For a nice examination of horror criticism and the differences and similarities of examining horror novels vs. horror films, see Gina Wisker, *Horror Fiction* (New York: Continuum Books, 2005).
[265] Jason Davis, "The Character of Fear: Writing the Horror Film," *Creative Screenwriting*, September/October, 2006.

generation."[266] As such, the horror genre in American cinema has taken on many faces throughout its history, from the RKO and Universal Studios creature features of the 1930s, to the alien invasion "B-movies" in the 1950s, through the slasher craze of the 1980s, up to the self-reflexive "postmodern" horror of the new millennium.[267]

A common thread throughout these cycles is the "monster," broadly constructed.[268] Frank McConnell contends that "each era chooses the monster it deserves," which demarcates lines of study and creates sub-genres within horror called "horror cycles."[269] A fruitful way we can be more specific and faithful to the dynamic evolution of cinematic horror texts is to focus on these cycles. For Noël Carroll, these "horror cycles emerge in times of social stress, [and] the genre is a means through which the anxieties of an era can be expressed."[270] The monsters that populate our horror films, however, are never representative of monsters themselves, but act as "stand-ins" for the cultural fear of the audience, "ultimately driven by its primal resonance with the mind's unformed and unassigned fears."[271] In an implicit defense of genre criticism, Gregory Waller contends that the "necessary critical task is to chart the course of specific cycles" in an effort to uncover the psychic workings of the social body that both creates and

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[266] James Ursini, "Introduction," in *The Horror Film Reader*, eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (Pompton Plains: Limelight Editions, 2000), 3.

[267] Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2004).

[268] Edward Ingebretsen has a fantastic book on the subject of the monster as it becomes integrated into news reports of MNOs and their lasting narrative power. He argues it is easy "to see how fantasy becomes polemic, and how horror pulp becomes 'news.' The political usefulness of the monster … is a result of the spell its narrative casts long after the telling is done. This is narrative's ideological residue … Genres, literary formulas as well as conventions of readerly response, come together seamlessly in these productions. … That is, narrative logic shapes 'reality' by providing the script in which events cohere (or are patterned) into meaning." Edward Ingebretsen, *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 158.

[269] Frank McConnell, *The Spoken Seen: Film and the Romantic Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 137.

[270] Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 207.

[271] David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1993), 399.

consumes them.[272] Genres are most interesting when there is a shift that marks a change in the social body, and looking back through the history of horror cycles in America can help the modern critic understand the rhetoric of recent cycles. Although I do not wish to give any more credibility to complaints that genre criticism is simply an exercise in categorization, the evolving nature of the horror genre (and what that evolution suggests as to its overall function) requires a cursory historical account of the horror film in American cinema before moving forward.

The horror film as an evolving genre

The first (and longest) cycle in horror films is the Monster Movie (1915-1948).[273] In the early days of cinema, filmmakers were struggling both with the limited technology and with the debate as the future of the medium itself. With both the lack of sound and the limitations in existing film stock to show darkness, filmmakers during this time took their visual lead from expressionist paintings, and their narrative sources from stories most people were already familiar with – the gothic stories and legends of Europe.[274] In

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[272] Waller, "Introduction," 9.

[273] There is no generalized agreement among scholars as to what constitutes a cycle, the dates of a cycle, or what it might be called. My summary here is an attempt to synthesize a large (and at times disjointed) literature base into something more manageable and concrete. John Kenneth Muir has written three books, all cited here, that attempt to describe the horror films that dominated particular decades (the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s). For the cycles I discuss in those time periods, his books were invaluable. I do not claim to be the absolute or final authority on the matter, but I feel that this representation is fairly close to what agreement there is among those who write about the horror genre in film. The dates are malleable and are only intended to represent when a particular type of horror film dominated the cinematic landscape; it does not mean that there were not films of this type before or after the dates listed. For example, I am very comfortable arguing that many of the horror films released from 1915-1948 were "monster movies," but this is not to say that there were no monster movies in the 1950s or beyond. It is only to say that, while monster movies are still made even today, they no longer make up a sizable portion of the horror films being produced. In addition to the specific research cited throughout this section, two websites helped me immeasurably with general research (e.g. determining how many slasher films were released between 1978 and 1989) and thematic guidance: "Horror Film History," accessed January 21, 2012, www.horrorfilmhistory.com; "Flick Chart," accessed January 21, 2012, www.flickchart.com/charts.

[274] See David Huckvale, *Touchstones of Gothic Horror: A Film Genealogy of Elevin Motifs and Images* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 109-133.

these stories, the monsters themselves often existed in a literal, physical, form with representative films including *The Golem* (1915), *Nosferatu* (1922), and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). With the advent of sound in the 1930s, filmmakers were able to add music to build suspense and use startling or unsettling sounds to frighten the audience (e.g. the howls of a wolf or the screams of a woman). Although the monsters were still often taken from the legends of the old world and the tales were set in faraway lands, the narrative themes were becoming more pronounced and the technological advancements allowed filmmakers to adjust to the changing times, impacted "by the war, existentialism, and modern physics … shadow[ing] the concurrent efforts of cubist, Dadaist, and emerging surrealist painters to stretch the human form into increasingly bizarre configurations."[275] What scared the audience of the Monster Movie in the 1930s, what I call the "horrifying element," was either the unknown, which lay beyond the civilized world, or a fear of humanity's technological advancements. Representative films of this time include *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), and *King Kong* (1933). Horror films in the 1930s were dominated by Universal Pictures' "creature features," which continued into the early 1940s, and culminated in the release of *The Wolf Man* in 1941.[276] Struggling to find new narrative sources, Universal released *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* in 1943 and, surprised by its phenomenal financial success, the studio spent the remainder of the decade churning out films that could be

[275] Skal, *The Monster Show*, 70-71. Skal is specifically writing about the growing legend of Lon Chaney in this quote, but it acts as an analogy for the changing times. As Skal notes, following the success of *Phantom of the Opera*, Chaney became the nation's first "celebrity in disguise," where legends maintain that he would practice plastic experiments on himself so that he wouldn't be recognized in public. His agent claimed that Chaney himself did not exist and was nothing but a constant character, a blank text that society could mold and write their history upon.

[276] R. K. Renfield, *Meet the Wolfman* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2005).

best described as 'add monsters and stir.'[277] These included films such as *Son of Dracula* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), *The Mummy's Curse* (1944), *House of Dracula* (1945), and *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).[278]

The 1950s saw the emergence of two popular and influential cycles, the first of which was the Alien Invasion cycle (1951-1957). Fueled by the Cold War, the nation flocked to see movies about the United States being overrun by an overpowering external force. The horrifying element in these films was a fear of Soviet (or, more broadly, communist) infiltration and representative films of the cycle include *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *It Came From Outer Space* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *Invasion of the Saucer-Men* (1957). In some cases, most notably *The Thing From Another World*, these films layered "Cold War subtext" with "post-World War II trauma or fear of the atomic age" which was another dominant theme in 1950s horror films.[279] The third cycle, which overlapped with much of the Alien Invasion cycle, was the Radiated Mutant cycle (1953-1959).[280] In Radiated Mutant films, some form of radiation is responsible for either the emergence of an irradiated monster or the mutation of a seemingly benign entity to gigantic proportions, which then wreaks

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[277] For a fantastic account of the Universal monster movies see Tom Weaver, Michael Brunas, and John Brunas, *Universal Horrors: The Studio's Classic Films, 1931-1946* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007).

[278] The Monster Movie is in a unique class. Although I mark the end of the cycle in 1948 and its popularity certainly wanes as "hot" new cycles emerge, the Monster Movie (which includes supernatural ghost stories for me) is the one genre of horror film that maintains a consistent presence across all decades.

[279] Bartłomiej Paszylk, *The Pleasure and Pain of Cult Horror Films* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), 55.

[280] Of all the cycles, the Radiated Mutant cycle presented the most trouble in choosing an end date. There are dozens of films produced after 1959 that could be categorized in this cycle, but the vast majority of them are imports from Japan. I chose to exclude them from my cycle analysis because, although they are no doubt part of the radiation fear that plagued the Japanese during this time (having been the only targets of a military nuclear strike), they were increasingly seen as a generic monster movie in 1960s America. Further, I place the end of the cycle at 1959 with the release of *The Giant Gila Monster*, a film that was more comedy than horror, which suggests that radiated mutants were no longer horrifying to the American public.

havoc. The police, military and other sources of authority (e.g. scientists) are often impotent in the face of this threat and the horrifying element is a fear of the atomic bomb and a distrust of scientific advancement.[281] A thematic distinction between the Radiated Mutant films of the 1950s and the technology critiques found in films like *Frankenstein* are that, in the Radiated Mutant film, "science's moral complexities are rarely [given] explicit consideration. … Scientific discovery has simply become part of the order of things."[282] In the 1930s, there was a fear that humanity might lose control over the horrors of technology and a plea for restraint in discovery. By the 1950s, however, all hopes for restraint were lost; the genie was out of the bottle and the question became: "what do we do in a world where our knowledge outstrips our ability to contain it?" Representative films of this cycle include: *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *Them!* (1954), *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1955), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), and *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958).

The fourth cycle of horror films was the B-Movie cycle (1956-1965). The B-Movie cycle didn't have a particular horrifying element, but was significant in that it represented a stylistic bridge between the third and fifth cycles. While many in the film industry feared that the television would replace going to the movies, American International Pictures (AIP) pursued a production strategy based on the assumption that there was a particular demographic that had no interest in gathering around the living

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[281] Just as there is some overlap between the horrifying element of the atomic bomb with the Alien Invasion cycle, there is also overlap between the horrifying element of the spread of international communism with the Radiated Mutant cycle. For example, Timothy Schowalter notes that one of the most famous and popular of the "big bug" movies, *Them!*, included "subtext about invasion disrupting the fabric of American life [which] played well to American fears of communist powers." Timothy D. Schowalter, *Insect Ecology: An Ecosystem Approach* (Burlington: Academic Press, 2009), 671.

[282] Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 146.

room TV with the family: the American teenager.[283] AIP correctly assumed that teenagers would prefer to go to the drive-in rather than hang out with mom and dad, and the event of "going to the movies" itself was more important than anything that was happening on-screen.[284] As a result, the studio produced films fast and cheap with titillating titles like *The Astounding She-Monster* (1957), *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), *The Brain Eaters* (1958), *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), *The Brain That Wouldn't Die* (1962) and *The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent* (1957).[285] Towards the end of the B-Movie cycle, there was an emergence of low-budget films that focused on gory depictions of violence. Dubbed by some as "splatter films," these movies pushed the levels of cinematic gore further than any film before them and were led by "the Godfather of Gore" Herschell Gordon Lewis' trilogy: *Blood Feast* (1963), *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964), and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965). The lesson learned from the early AIP films was that horror movies could be done with minimal investment at the production level and still turn a sizable profit. Splatter films raced to make their movies on the cheap and replaced the silly monsters of the early B-Movies with crazed psychopaths while ratcheting up the gore factor exponentially. This turn to graphic violence kick-started the exploitation cycle in American cinema and

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[283] By the mid-1950s, the majority of the people going to the movies were teenagers, and this majority was even more pronounced when one looks at the statistics of those who went to the movies more than once a week. In November 1957, industry magazine the *Motion Picture Herald,* noted that nearly 53% of "frequent moviegoers" were under the age of 20. As quoted in Kevin Heffernan, "The Hypnosis Horror Films of the 1950s: Genre Texts and Industrial Context," *Journal of Film & Video* 54 (2002). EBSCOhost (12856138).

[284] The important thing for AIP was to make going to the movies an *event*. Heffernan describes the AIP formula for success as "provid[ing] the familiar B-picture genres – horror, science fiction, action-adventure – but [present] them in ways that distinguished them from their television, radio, or comic book versions." Heffernan, "Hypnosis Horror Films," 58.

[285] Stephen King described these AIP films as "simple, shot in a hurry, and so amateurish that one can sometimes see the shadow of a boom mike in the shot or catch the gleam of an air tank inside the monster suit of an underwater creature (as in *Attack of the Giant Leeches*). Arkoff himself recalls that they rarely began with a completed script or even a coherent screen treatment." King, *Danse Macabre*, 32.

prompted AIP to stop making cheap horror films in favor of cranking out cheap teen beach party films.[286] Although B-Movies ruled the roost in the 1960s, there were a few horror films released from acclaimed filmmakers that gestured toward the watershed change that was coming. Alfred Hitchcock took a break from the suspense genre to do some genuine horror work with *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963). Robert Wise, who directed critically-acclaimed films such as *Run Silent, Run Deep* and *The Sound of Music*, helmed *The Haunting* (1963) while Roman Polanski, who would go on to direct Oscar winners *Chinatown* and *The Pianist,* directed *Repulsion* (1965). Although these films were overwhelmed, in terms of sheer numbers, by the low-budget horror fare of the decade, they were a preview of the future of horror films.

The year 1968 saw the release of two films, *Night of the Living Dead* and *Rosemary's Baby*, that marked the beginning of the fifth cycle: the Terror at Home cycle (1968-1982). In this cycle, the films were more serious and the horror was played less for silly drive-in thrills and more towards genuine terror. The horrifying element was that horror had come home to roost and engulfed us as the stability of civilization cracked. "Americans [were] anxious about virtually every aspect of contemporary life …" Muir writes, and they "were left feeling empty, de-valued and bereft of the moral values that had comforted previous generations."[287] In this cycle, the horror was real, the stability of the family was a myth, and the rule of law collapsed. The horror was no longer confined to Transylvania nor was it dependent on 30-foot ants. Rather, it was

[286] The goal for AIP was always maximum return for minimal investment. Although there were horror films released by AIP after 1965, the core of their horror releases were out – at the heart of the AIP horror runs were Edgar Allen Poe works adapted for the screen by Roger Corman, and the last Poe/Corman film, *The Tomb of Ligeia*, was released in 1964. In the mid to late 1960s, AIP focused on teen exploitation films like *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1966) and then moved to other exploitation films in the 1970s. Toward the end of their run, AIP produced higher-end features like *Amityville Horror* and *Mad Max*, both released in 1979. Although these films were considered "better" by critical standards, the higher budgets lowered the overall bottom line for the studio and they were bought out and renamed Orion Pictures in the 1980s.
[287] John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), 1, 3.

happening next door and it was your husband who was selling your womb to the devil. Examples of the Terror at Home cycle include *The Exorcist* (1973), *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Carrie* (1976), *The Brood* (1979), *The Shining* (1980), and *Poltergeist* (1982).

Running concurrently with the Terror at Home cycle, reminding us that there were still things "out there" that could kill us, was the sixth cycle: Nature Horror (1972-1980). The horrifying element in these films was the notion that humanity's encroachment into nature had gone too far and that the earth was fighting back. Muir contends, "these films reflected genuine audience trepidation that Mother Nature would not stand for man's [sic] continued pillaging and pollution of the Earth."[288] These films played on the fears generated by the eco-consciousness of the 1970s and included films like *Frogs* (1972), *Snakes* (1974), *Locusts* (1974), *The Killer Snakes* (1975), *JAWS* (1975), *Grizzly* (1976), *The Savage Bees* (1976), *Orca* (1977), *Piranha* (1978) and *Alligator* (1980). Similar in plot and narrative structure to the Radiated Mutant film, the Nature Horror film warned us against the arrogance of technological advancement and a refusal to respect our natural habitat. The fifth and sixth cycles, taken together, illustrate a transitional time for the United States, from the idealism of the 1960s to the coming conservatism of Reagan's America. Muir concludes that, "as a nation, America went from being a country that wanted to help the world to a country whose population wanted better stock options. The seventies are the bridge between those disparate mind-states."[289] More specifically, the 1970s were a time when the nation's master narratives were being (re)negotiated and the horror films of the times reflected and contributed to that debate.

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[288] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*, 2.
[289] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*, 5.

The seventh horror cycle was born out of the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the heightened tensions of the Cold War, the continued volatility of gender norms in a changing economic environment and, like the beginning of every cycle, the financial success of a key film. The huge success of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) kick started one of the most studied and famous of all the horror cycles: the Slasher Movie (1978-1989).[290] While some consider this to be an outgrowth of the Terror at Home cycle because many of the films deal with issues surrounding the "collapse of the family," the Slasher film is wholly unique with its own set of narrative standards and structural requirements.[291] The horrifying element in these films was a fear of the changing social values, or the "culture wars," in the midst of a heightened existential threat by the Soviet Union. Representative films during this time were *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980), *My Bloody Valentine* (1981), *The Funhouse* (1981), *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (1984), *April Fool's Day* (1986), and *Maniac Cop* (1988). This was a time that was also dominated by franchises, so much so that it was nearly a return to the mentality of the Universal creature features, except instead of a recipe of "add monsters and stir," it was "add psycho killer, dice teenagers, and let simmer." Adding to the situation was a new phenomenon spawned by the technological

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[290] There are several films that can be considered slasher films that were made prior to *Halloween*, most notably *I Dismember Mama* (1972), *Don't Look in the Basement* (1973), *Black Christmas* (1974) and *Axe* (1977). Although some of these films have generated some buzz after the fact (e.g. *Black Christmas* is often called "the first slasher" and was re-made in 2006), none of these films had much of an impact upon their initial release. See L. Kent Wolgamott, "Slasher Flick 'Black Christmas' Boring, Predictable, Not Scary," *Lincoln Journal Star*, December 26, 2006, City edition. LexisNexis. It was the success of *Halloween* and, maybe even more importantly, *Halloween II* (1981), which showed the potential to franchise slasher films, that truly started the cycle. For a much more robust defense of *Halloween* starting the slasher cycle, see Jim Harper, *Legacy of Blood: A Comprehensive Guide to Slasher Movies* (Manchester: Headpress, 2004).

[291] For one of the better academic treatments on the Slasher film, and to find a more lengthy discussion of the Slasher film as it relates to the family, see Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*.

advancement of the VCR – the direct to video market. No longer did producers have to worry about earning a spot in the local movie theater, they could target their audience directly. The result was an "AIP effect" where producers increasingly moved toward exploitation, shock, and gore and tried to do it as cheaply as possible. While movie theaters often wouldn't screen a film that hadn't been rated by the MPAA, video rental stores didn't have such rules and many would rent these movies to teenagers (the demographic the horror genre has historically thrived on, but who had to sneak in to R-rated features at the theater).[292] The home video market also helped fuel the franchise phenomenon as producers could slap the name of a popular film series on other films they owned to push rentals.[293] Much like the splatter films before them, many of these movies focused on increasingly realistic gore and body horror, often at the expense of good storytelling.

The advancement of gore effects in the 1980s also helped to fuel a concurrent eighth horror cycle: the Body Horror film (1981-1987). A focus on the body and on bodily health surged in the 1980s.[294] According to Film International writer Alexander

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[292] For a more detailed discussion of how the VCR impacted the horror films of the 1980s and the "video nasties" debate that dominated Great Britain during this time, see James Kendrick, "A Nasty Situation: Social Panics, Transnationalism, and the Video Nasty," in *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*, ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

[293] There are several famous examples of this – Moustapha Akkad, executive producer of the *Halloween* franchise, put the "Halloween" label on 1982's *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* even though the film had nothing to do with the other films and didn't even have the killer Michael Meyers in the film at all. Similarly, Dimension films (who owned the rights to the *Hellraiser* franchise) added in a handful of scenes featuring *Hellraiser*'s Cenobites to two non-*Hellraiser* screenplays they had optioned and released the films to the direct to video market as the fifth and sixth installment of the franchise. Although Pinhead is featured prominently on the cover of the rental and the poster, he has a screentime of less than 10 minutes in the two films combined.

[294] Of course there has been a focus on the body and health for centuries prior to the 1980s and this is not to suggest that people only became concerned with the material body in the 1980s. The 1980s did, however, see a marked change in how we view the body in relation to recent history. Gym memberships surged in the 1980s and many Americans began to make special note of their long-term health. From Nancy Reagan's anti-drug campaign to the fitness craze to the rise of the AIDS epidemic, the 1980s had a particular eye towards bodily health. A recent article recalls that, "back in the days of leg warmers and aerobics classes, the term 'fitness craze' was coined to reflect the trend towards a healthier lifestyle. As

Kirschenbaum, the Body Horror films were "*about* transitional physical states, *about* the grotesque and uncomfortable process of severe bodily transformation."[295] The horrifying element was that some external force would invade one's body and force it to betray the subject through the loss of material integrity; it often preyed on a fear of "subversion by disease; of losing the very allure, those 'buns of steel,' the culture demanded of its people."[296] Representative films from this cycle are *The Howling* (1981), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *Cat People* (1982), *Basket Case* (1982), *Videodrome* (1983), *The Fly* (1986), *Aliens* (1986), and *Hellraiser* (1987).

The end of the Cold War and the "victory" of transnational capitalism ushered in two concurrent horror cycles in the 1990s, both of which made a turn away from the gore-fests that dominated releases in the late 1980s. Just as it had done in the wake of the B-Movie cycle, horror films became more serious and the terror returned home. The ninth cycle was the Interloper film (1990-1996). In the Interloper film, the villain interjects himself or (as was more likely in the 1990s) herself into the life of the protagonist and threatens his life and/or lifestyle stability. As the interloper in these films often gained access to the protagonist via a character flaw, the horrifying element of these films lay in the fear that seemingly small mistakes have the potential to unravel one's entire life. These weren't the obvious bad decisions made in the slasher film, but rather innocuous ones like trusting a nanny without doing an appropriate background check – *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992).[297] Representative films of the Interloper cycle

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'conspicuous consumption' set the agenda of the 1980s, soon no one's life was complete without a gym membership." "Fitness Crazed?," *Private Equity International*, May, 2003. LexisNexis.

[295] Alexander Kirschenbaum, "The New Flesh: A Critical Analysis of 1980s Metamorphosis Cinema," July 4, 2011, accessed January 27, 2012, http://filmint.nu/?p=2656, par. 1. *Emphasis in original.*

[296] John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1980s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007), 11.

[297] Some may argue that these films represent a different genre altogether – the "thriller" genre. The reason for this linguistic shift is relatively simple upon investigation. As John Kenneth Muir explains, even though these films contain all of the characteristics of a horror film, the studios that released them engaged in a campaign to convince the public that they were anything but. These films began carrying A-list talent

include *Cape Fear* (1991), *Sleeping With the* Enemy (1991), *Single White Female* (1992), *Poison Ivy* (1992), *The Crush* (1993), *Disclosure* (1994), and *The Fan* (1996). Similar to the Terror at Home cycle, these films brought the danger "into the realms of the American suburban family house and the professional work-place."[298]

The tenth horror cycle, concurrent with the Interloper film, was the Serial Killer movie (1990-2002). The horrifying element in these films was that nobody could be trusted any more, the rule of law had completely collapsed, and it was just a matter of time before your next door neighbor decided to keep you trapped in the well he dug in his basement. The excesses of the previous decade had led to a national recession and increased economic and social inequity, and now we were paying the price. These films reflected the fear that "heartland America had been left untended for too long [and] imagined perversion and madness sprouting like weeds."[299] Representative films during this cycle were *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Kalifornia* (1992), *Nightwatch* (1994), *Se7en* (1995), *Kiss the Girls* (1997), *The Bone Collector* (1999), *American Psycho* (2000) and *Hannibal* (2001). During this time, there were also no less than a half dozen made-for-TV biopics about virtually every American serial killer from Ed Gein to Jeffrey Dahmer.

The events on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent "War on Terror" ushered in the eleventh horror cycle and the primary case study of this project: torture porn (2003-2008).[300] Some of the defining characteristics of this cycle include themes of disappearance and isolation, and the focus on torture and graphic depictions of bodily

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and the larger budgets that accompany such moves; the "big studio approach of the 1990s meant that horror movies could not limit the size of their audiences in any way; could not afford even to be known, simply, as a horror film." Muir, *Horror Films of the 1990s*, 10.

[298] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1990s*, 9.

[299] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1990s*, 5.

[300] The term "torture porn" was coined by David Edelstein in a 2006 article that appeared in *New York Magazine*. See Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn," par. 9.

mutilation. The horrifying element in these films, which will be discussed in substantial detail later, is the loss of bodily integrity and the collapse of moral norms in the face of sadistic desire. From the outset, we should determine what sets torture porn aside as a unique cycle and understand what makes it different from the cycles that preceded it. In the popular media, what distinguishes torture porn from earlier cycles is its reliance on excessive violence and gore. For Bob Longino, these horror films are "never just plain-old scary anymore, [but] gory, gruesome and repulsive. It's about heads getting chopped off, human flesh being devoured and devilish tricks being played with a sharp scythe."[301] Mainstream critics contend that torture porn represents a departure from earlier horror cycles because the goal of the film is not fear, but repulsion, and not to frighten an audience, but to sicken them. Scholars who engage in a more robust examination of horror's past, however, dismiss this position. Adam Lowenstein, for example, contends that the violence in torture porn is not a new phenomenon, but part of a category he terms "spectacle horror."[302] For Lowenstein, spectacle horror films are analogous to the "splatter films" of the 1960s "where the cinema showman" served a "carnivalesque function" by "speaking directly to the audience about the fearsome wonder of what they were about to see."[303] For Jonathan Crane, the line for violence and gore was drawn in 1963 with Herschell Gordon Lewis' *Blood Feast*. He argues, "The point from which there is no return does not lie in the future. The red line that cannot be providently crossed was drawn years ago. … Despite obscene market pressures and impossible technological advances, the future of horror was plotted" with *Blood Feast*.[304] Although

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[301] Bob Longino, "Horror to the Third Degree," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 28, 2005, Movies & More section. LexisNexis.
[302] Adam Lowenstein, "Spectacle Horror and 'Hostel': Why 'Torture Porn' Does Not Exist," *Critical Quarterly* 53 (2011). EBSCOhost (60188052).
[303] Lowenstein, "Spectacle Horror," 47.
[304] Crane, "Scraping Bottom," 154-156.

torture porn is not a continuation of the 1960s splatter film cycle, the existence of that cycle suggests that the defining characteristic of torture porn cannot simply be the violence, as mainstream critics would have us believe.

The dominant characteristic of torture porn is not simply graphic violence, but a focus on confinement, violence deployed as torture, and a connection to questions of the *morality* of torture. Reynold Humphries argues that there is something uniquely *American* about films like *Hostel*, in that the genre emerged at a time when theaters were filled with neo-slasher re-makes and Asian horror imports and torture porn provided American audiences with

> a *waking* nightmare. Critics react with outrage to these films because, somewhere within their most intimate selves, they have asked [what would it be like to mutilate another person] and been given an answer by the film as if they really had desired something so utterly monstrous (or "depraved"). What is so horrifying about torture – or simply callous mistreatment – in, for example, Guantanamo or the sealed-off secret prisons that receive those abducted by the CIA is the fact that a supposedly average person is at the origin of it.[305]

It is not the gore, but the focus on an affective response to torture – and the "average person" characteristic of the torturer – that is unique to the cycle and suggests a connection to the real world torture that took place at Abu Ghraib. Although *Blood Feast* might have set the standard for extreme violence, those on-screen sacrifices were done to resurrect the Egyptian goddess Ishtar, not to provide thrills to the torturer.

I argue that there are ten major horror cycles that precede the rise of torture porn in 2003. It is impossible, of course, to account for every horror film released since the beginning of cinema and marking off particular cycles should not be seen as an attempt to do that. My argument is that at particular times in history, a particular type of horror film

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[305] Reynold Humphries, "A (Post)Modern House of Pain: 'FearDotCom' and the Prehistory of the Post-9/11 Torture Film," in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 66.

dominated the market-share (either through the sheer number of similar films released, financial success, or both). As such, it is possible for rhetorical critics to look at these "cycle" trends in hopes of gaining a better understanding the cultural fears that produced them.[306] Although there has been a substantial amount of attention paid to torture porn, very little rhetorical analysis has been done regarding *the cycle*. A recent essay by Dean Lockwood has attempted to defend the subgenre against criticisms of voyeuristic sadism by using the work of Gilles Deleuze to argue that these films have a more masochistic flavor.[307] In film studies, a pair of articles appears that approach the subject matter from an academic perspective. Christopher Sharrett argues that defenders of torture porn films fall short in their arguments, and the films represent "the time-honored problem of an art work partaking amply of the problems it supposedly wants to criticize."[308] Jerod Ra'Del Hollyfield, on the other hand, believes that the explicit nature of torture porn makes their criticisms of nationalism and capitalism "visceral, exposing [their] audience to the reality of America's current status within international culture."[309] In both cases, the authors take on important issues of ideology and cinematic critiques of imperialism and capitalist domination, however, I can find no evidence that rhetorical studies has taken up the questions of the social trauma of Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib in relation to torture porn. One of the reasons for this may be in the approach that rhetorical studies has taken toward the subject of the horror film. In an effort to understand both the history of how

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[306] This is one of the goals of scholar Kendall R. Phillips in his study of horror cinema. For an example, see Kendall R. Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005).

[307] Dean Lockwood, "All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of 'Torture Porn'," *Popular Communication* (2009): 40-48.

[308] Christopher Sharrett, "The Problem of 'Saw': 'Torture Porn' and the Conservatism of Contemporary Horror Films," *Cineaste* 35 (2009): 35.

[309] Jerod Ra'Del Hollyfield, "Torture Porn and the Bodies Politic: Post Cold-War American Perspectives in Eli Roth's *Hostel* and *Hostel: Part II*," *Cineaction* (2009): 31.

the horror film has been treated in rhetorical analysis and to better situate this project, I will now turn my attention to the horror film in rhetorical studies.

The horror film in rhetorical studies

Discussion of horror films in rhetorical studies is relatively sparse and few, if any, claim to be performing a genre criticism. I contend, however, that the little analysis that is done often does constitute a form of genre criticism, even as it runs contrary to the prescribed practice of the methodology. Although they claim to use a wide variety of methodological approaches, the rhetorical scholars who choose to engage horror films seem to take one of three approaches: (1) examine horror cinema to better understand the audience member; (2) examine horror cinema to gain insight into the culture that produced it; or (3) examine horror cinema to illustrate the rhetorical reality created through them.[310] To better understand the differences in these approaches, I will examine the literature and provide examples of how each approach comes to understand the rhetorical place of the horror film.

The first approach examines horror cinema to better understand the audience member.[311] One example of this approach include Kendall R. Phillips' 1998 essay which

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[310] There are a few examples of "genre criticism" done in relation to horror films that didn't actually examine the films themselves. For example, in 1998 Melissa Spirek and Jack Glascock analyzed 50 years of print advertisements for horror films to see if a pattern of sexualized violence could be uncovered. They found that the "protagonists in frightening film ads were found to be males significantly more often than females," but that the recent trend was that "male and female victims appeared to be equally represented." Melissa M. Spirek and Jack Glascock, "Gender Analysis of Frightening Film Newspaper Advertisements: A 50-Year Overview (1940-1990)," *Communication Quarterly* 46 (1998): 105.

[311] Though I am unsure if they should be considered in the rhetorical studies scholarship, there were a number of essays published that examined audience reaction and reception to horror films. If one does consider them rhetorical scholarship, they are most certainly examples of the first approach as they hope to better understand the particular audience that consumes the text. Examples include Kimberly A. Neuendorf and Glenn G. Sparks, who studied fear as a cue-specific affect in the audiences of horror films. They discovered what every horror aficionado already knew, "that fear attached to specific cues is generated when such cues are encountered again, at least partially independent of one's general tendency to fear." Kimberly A. Neuendorf and Glenn G. Sparks, "Predicting Emotional Responses to Horror Films from Cue-Specific Affect," *Communication Quarterly* 36 (1988): 24. Simply put, when the music gets scary, don't

looked at Jonathan Demme's film, *The Silence of the Lambs*, to more closely examine the rhetoric of controversy between "closely-allied" gay and feminist critics "as they struggle to resolve divergent interpretations."[312] He argues that the obstacles facing the film's protagonist, Clarice Starling, represent the tension between the extremes of community norms and individual expression, which was exemplified by the different audience reactions to the film.[313] In 2006, Barry Brummett provided an analysis of *The Ring*, in which he drew a rhetorical homology between Walter Benjamin's work on mechanical reproduction and the human subject in relation to capital. Noting a trend in mass-

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back into the dark corner of the room. For similar research, see Ron Tamborini and James Stiff, "Predictors of Horror Film Attendance and Appeal: An Analysis of the Audience for Frightening Films," *Communication Research* 14 (1987). EBSCOhost (6348157). Other audience experiments were conducted by Cynthia Hoffner and Joanne Cantor, who sought to determine if age played a role in the enjoyment of horror films, and by Glenn G. Sparks and Robert M. Ogles, who asked if prior emotional information impacted an audience's reaction to horror. See Cynthia Hoffner and Joanne Cantor, "Factors Affecting Children's Enjoyment of a Frightening Film Sequence," *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991); Glenn G. Sparks and Robert M Ogles, "The Role of Preferred Coping Style and Emotional Forewarning in Predicting Emotional Reactions to a Suspenseful Film," *Communication Reports* 7 (1994). Through the 1990s, most of the social science research narrowed from audience reception to adolescent reception and coping mechanisms. Multiple essays covering these issues were published during the decade. See Glenn G. Sparks, Melissa M. Spirek, and Kelly Hodgson, "Individual Differences in Arousability: Implications for Understanding Immediate and Lingering Emotional Reactions to Frightening Mass Media," *Communication Quarterly* 41 (1993): 465-476. EBSCOhost (18451730). Mary Beth Oliver, "Adolescents' Enjoyment of Graphic Horror," *Communication Research* 20 (1993): 30-51. EBSCOhost (9708253208). Deirdre D. Johnston, "Adolescents' Motivations for Viewing Graphic Horror," *Human Communication Research* 21 (1995): 522-553. EBSCOhost (9507192287). Cynthia Hoffner, "Adolescents' Coping with Frightening Mass Media," *Communication Research* 22 (1995): 325-347. EBSCOhost (9507266723). Cynthia Hoffner and Margaret J. Haefner, "Children's Comforting of Frightened Coviewers," *Communication Research* 24 (1997): 136-153. EBSCOhost (9704023060).

[312] Kendall R. Phillips, "Unmasking Buffalo Bill: Interpretive Controversy and *The Silence of the Lambs*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 28 (1998): 34.

[313] Although I cite Phillips as an example of the first approach in how rhetorical critics approach the horror film, he is by no means limited to that frame. In fact, in his most recent book, *Dark Directions*, Phillips devotes large sections to the second approach (understanding the culture that produced the horror film). He writes that, "horror films tend to tap into broader cultural anxieties and serve as a kind of allegorical projection of our very real fears onto the generally safer space of the silver screen. Not surprisingly, then, as the anxieties circulating in the culture in the twentieth century changed, so too did the films that reflected them." Kendall R. Phillips, *Dark Directions: Romero, Crave, Carpenter, and the Modern Horror Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2012), 2. From this, he looks at the works of an all-star cast of horror directors with the assumption that the cultural anxieties will be reflected through the rhetorical styles of these filmmakers.

produced consumer products designed to look old, worn and tattered, Brummett contends "they possess manufactured auras, re-sutured onto brand new mass-produced units so as to create the simulation of lived human experience," while *The Ring* allows us to see "the 'unique' complement to an anxiety over a copy."[314] In 2010, Claire Sisco King examined the "first all gay slasher film," *Hellbent*, but found it to be "neither a generic novelty nor the unique text its billing suggests; rather, *Hellbent* exemplifies the thoroughgoing tendency within American popular culture to encourage homosexuality to straighten up."[315] She concludes with a warning against films which promise a particular politics but only offer a diluted discourse: "Texts that are (mis)labeled as queer but largely divested of, or even contrary to, queer politics risk emptying out the political use-value of queerness as a theoretical concept and a subject position."[316]

The second approach examines horror cinema in hopes of better understanding the culture that produced it. The earliest example of this approach appears in 1975 with Thomas Frentz and Thomas Farrell's reading of *The Exorcist*. They argue that the film "at once crystallized America's disillusionment with Positivism and at the same time reaffirmed transcendent Christian faith as the most viable means of coping with the problems of contemporary life."[317] Frentz and Farrell contend that American society moves back and forth between the two poles of Positivism and Transcendence, and the social impact of *The Exorcist* was mutually constitutive of one of these great shifts. Although early 1970s-America had lost faith in Positivism (which Frentz and Farrell

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[314] Barry Brummett, "Rhetorical Homologies in Walter Benjamin, *The Ring*, and Capital," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36 (2006): 466; 464.
[315] Claire Sisco King, "Un-Queering Horror: 'Hellbent' and the Policing of the 'Gay Slasher'," *Western Journal of Communication* 74 (2010): 265. EBSCOhost (50653096).
[316] King, "Unqueering Horror," 265.
[317] Thomas S. Frentz and Thomas B. Farrell, "Conversion of America's Consciousness: The Rhetoric of *The Exorcist*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 40.

understand as a commitment to concrete references, knowledge that is observable, and reductionist predictions), nothing had stepped forward to energize the public and motivate them towards change and movement. The authors argue that, "it is precisely because *The Exorcist* transcended the secularism and particularity of recent anti-positivistic movements that it succeeded in changing the American consciousness where the others failed."[318] What is groundbreaking about this particular essay is that it gave a social power to the rhetorical function of horror films that hadn't been considered in the discipline prior. They conclude, "If the public response to *The Exorcist* is a sign of intense disillusionment with current positivistic values, then surely one message of the work is an agonizing cry for transcendent social rituals which will enable us to comprehend and to exorcise our social evils."[319] For Frentz and Farrell, *The Exorcist* gives legitimacy to an understanding of horror that acts as both a reflection of, and a catalyst to, changes in social identity. A more recent example of this approach is Elyce Rae Helford's analysis of *The Stepford Wives*. In it, she argues that the critical responses to the film were marked by the "mainstream US media culture's often contradictory perspectives on second wave feminism."[320] With an eye toward better understanding the sexual politics of 1970s America, Helford writes, "What made Forbes' *The Stepford Wives* particularly compelling (as well as aggravating) to diverse audiences in 1975 seems to be its overt engagement with second-wave feminist discourse and images."[321] For many of the scholars who are interested in horror films, it is this second approach that

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[318] Frentz and Farrell, "America's Consciousness," 43.
[319] Frentz and Farrell, "America's Consciousness," 47.
[320] Elyce Rae Helford, "'The Stepford Wives' and the Gaze," *Feminist Media Studies* 6 (2006): 146. EBSCOhost (20917217).
[321] Helford, "'Stepford Wives'," 147.

is the most productive.[322] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas argues that, "through the horror film we can learn about history, but not as the usual names/places/dates paradigm; instead, we can begin to understand the crucial factor of the lived human experience."[323]

The third approach distinguishes itself from the previous two by assigning a greater constitutive power to the film(s). Although this assumption can be found in earlier approaches (e.g. Frentz and Farrell's belief that *The Exorcist* fostered identity renegotiations), this third approach asks how film might create rhetorical constituencies as its primary focus. The scholars who have headed this approach in rhetorical studies are Thomas Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing.[324] Following his essay on *The Exorcist*, Frentz paired with Rushing to explore notions of cultural myth and their analysis of a handful of horror classics laid fertile ground for future research into horror and fear. In 1989, Rushing invoked Barbara Creed, contemporary feminist theory, and cultural myth to argue that the *Alien* franchise's Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver) acted as the divided goddess against the Alien as devouring mother.[325] She contends that the feminist message of the primary narrative may be strong, but a "close examination of the sub-text,

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[322] Another example of this approach, though not limited to just horror films, is Clair Sisco King's book *Washed in Blood*. Looking specifically at the trauma of Nine-Eleven, she argues against the notion that the event was traumatic because the nation was surprised by the attack. Citing Claire Kahane, King contends that, "despite the prevailing assertion that the nation did not 'see it coming,' much of the horror of 9/11 stems from 'preexisting anxieties.'" King notes that films such as *Armageddon* and *Fight Club* both had scenes of the towers collapsing several years before the attacks. Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 196.

[323] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, "History and Horror," *Screen Education*, Winter, 2010, 53. EBSCOhost (51303416).

[324] Although some might contend that Frentz and Rushing more often tread in the field of science fiction, as opposed to horror, their focus on rhetorical myth as it relates to genre criticism is instrumental to my approach in this project.

[325] This work is continued and extended by Picart in 2004. Moving the Frankenstein myth and the notion of the shadow into the fourth film of the franchise, *Alien: Resurrection*, Picart contends, "The changes in this *Alien* narrative ultimately heighten the movements across dark humor and horror, and enable more pronounced and complex conjunctions across the three types of shadows, particularly in the case of the monstrous female characters like Ripley and Call." Caroline Joan S. Picart, "The Third Shadow and Hybrid Genres: Horror, Humor, Gender, and Race in 'Alien Resurrection'," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 1 (2004): 351. EBSCOhost (14387804).

however, discloses that the story mixes the feminine descent and revenge motifs with the more familiar ego-hero myth … [and] the undercurrents reveal that the feminine is actually subverted."[326] In the same year, Rushing and Frentz analyze the films *Blade Runner*, *Terminator*, and *Rocky IV* and argued that the myth of the Frankenstein "machine is currently a largely unseen malignancy which will indeed result in the degeneration or death of humanity in the future, but only if the prescription for remedy implanted within the myth itself is not heeded."[327] They come to this conclusion by noting that the anti-technological Frankenstein myth is truly a story of masculine control, existing beyond the Frankenstein story proper. Enfolded within this myth, however, is its opposite, the feminist myth of nature, which forces an oppositional decision between identification and division.

Beyond the detailed textual readings that Rushing and Frentz provide, they more generally offer scholars the possibility that well-known narratives may become universal myths that play themselves out in seemingly unlikely stories. In 1993, again moving their scholarship beyond the text, Frentz and Rushing attempt to develop "a critical perspective intended to account for the operation of both historical and universal symbols within rhetorical texts" with the expressed desire to "redress the seeming incommensurability between ideological and archetypal approaches to rhetorical criticism."[328] Looking at the film *JAWS*, they conclude that the mythic constructs of the hunter, the hunt, and the hunted are consistent with an ideological reading of the film based on Marxist principles, and argue that an integrated approach is necessary for a

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[326] Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in 'Alien' and 'Aliens': Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 10.
[327] Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frentz, "The Frankenstein Myth in Contemporary Cinema," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (1989): 76.
[328] Thomas S. Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing, "Integrating Ideology and Archetype in Rhetorical Criticism, Part II: A Case Study of *Jaws*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 64.

richer and fuller understanding of the rhetorical work at play than a singular model (be it merely mythic or ideological) would allow. The culmination of this work appears in their 1995 book, *Projecting the Shadow*. In it, not only do they demand critical recognition that films carry true social importance, but they articulate the place and role of the critic who chooses to take up such a task:

> Our role as critics is similar to that of the depth analyst: to interpret how the film as collective dream provides a picture of the cultural unconscious. … For dream and myth not only express our condition, they also tap into the depths of the unconscious to reveal how we might change that condition. They may even anticipate the future in a prospective or oracular form.[329]

According to Rushing and Frentz, films act as cultural barometers, providing insight into critical aspects of the social experience.

To date, however, I find few examples of this third approach in rhetorical studies beyond the pioneering work of Frentz and Rushing, with two notable exceptions.[330] The first is Barry Brummett's 1985 essay on haunted house films. For Brummett, the cinematic discourse of the haunted house provides the audience "equipment for living," a Burkean term for discursive means to deal with and confront real life issues. The haunted house film is about "a fear of things falling apart and a failure of the center to hold."[331] What is unique about Brummett's essay is the time he devotes to film as a medium and how the materiality of film impacts the viewing experience. For example, when he discusses the recurring that accompanies haunting, he comments that the film continues

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[329] Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 47-48.

[330] It is possible that Caroline Joan S. Picart's essay on hybrid genres is another example of this approach to criticism. While it certainly engages myth and the same types of questions that Frentz and Rushing ask, I'm hesitant to say that it is an example of how rhetorical studies works with horror films. It is, however, a stylistic example of how genre studies might be performed when informed by other theory and is noteworthy for that alone. See Picart, "The Third Shadow."

[331] Barry Brummett, "Electric Literature as Equipment for Living: Haunted House Films," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (1985): 250.

to haunt the theater every two hours. He also notes the potential for cinema, as a medium, to disrupt the smooth flow of time, analogous to the disorientations to the visions of the child protagonist Danny in Stanley Kubrick's film, *The Shining*. What benefits Brummett's rhetorical reading, and what distinguishes it from a more commonplace film studies reading, are his examinations of film beyond the text and the cultural ramifications of these horror stories. The second exception is Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat's 2005 essay "Zombie Trouble" which examined the rhetorical impact of ideology and the destructuring logics of transnational capital with an exploration through the history of zombie films. In it, they contend that zombie films have historically revolved around two types of reanimated corpses: the laboring zombie and the ravenous zombie. Drawing an analogy from the laboring zombie to traditional Marxist notions of ideology, and the ravenous zombie to more recent conceptualizations of ideology centered around interpellation, Gunn and Treat use no less than a dozen zombie films to "provide a map of the field in respect to ideology by providing an allegorical vocabulary for a central subject of disciplinary anxiety, namely, the rhetorical agent."[332] It is this focus on the rhetorical agent that differentiates this approach from the others I've outlined.

Although at first glance the analysis of horror films in rhetorical studies seems scattershot, the lessons we can learn from the existing literature are rooted in how the scholar chooses to engage the notion of constitutive rhetoric. In all of these approaches, an assumption is made that the cultural apparatus rhetorically calls a subject into being.[333]

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[332] Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat, "Zombie Trouble: A Propaedeutic on Ideological Subjectificaiton and the Unconscious," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91 (2005): 164.

[333] Constitutive rhetoric is understood here as *the cultural apparatus which rhetorically calls into being the subject*. This statement can be broken up into three parts: the cultural apparatus, the subject, and rhetorically called into being. I argue that each of the three approaches focuses on a different aspect of constitutive rhetoric. Of course, in each of the essays, there is a discussion that goes beyond one of these three concepts, but my argument is that the primary focus is on one of these three.

The first approach focuses on the subject and hopes to better understand who he or she is. For example, in Phillips' essay, he contends that the "textual consumption" of *Silence of the Lambs* can generate a subject who understands "the notion of community and the difficulty involved in becoming part of, but not consumed by, communal relations."[334] The second approach, however, focuses not on the subject, but on the cultural apparatus. In this approach, the critic hopes that looking at horror films will help him or her better understand the culture from which these artifacts emerged. For example, Helford contends that her 2006 analysis of *The Stepford Wives* will allow scholars to better understand the "US culture of the 1970s as it wrestled with and negotiated the second wave of the women's movement."[335] And finally, the third approach focuses on what it means to be rhetorically called into being. In this approach the critic hopes that examining horror cinema allows him or her to more clearly see the rhetorical map upon which our understanding of reality is negotiated. In this approach, the horror film calls into being a very particular subject for a very particular reason and a thorough rhetorical analysis should illuminate the discursive strategies at play and provide us with, what Gunn and Treat term, the vocabulary for that rhetorical agent.

In this section, I explained how one of the powerful elements of the horror genre is its potential to quickly evolve and reflect the fears of the culture that created it. I outlined the eleven horror cycles that have dominated the genre since the early 1900s and provided a short overview of the genre that will be the subject of my extended case study – torture porn. I also outlined how rhetorical studies has currently engaged horror films as artifacts. At this point, it should be clear that there is disconnect between how

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[334] Phillips, "Unmasking Buffalo Bill," 27. In this section of the essay, Phillips focuses on the subject by providing his own personal reading of the film – this is the recognition of himself as a rhetorical subject that was called into being by the "textual consumption" (his phrasing) of the artifact.
[335] Helford, "'Stepford Wives'," 154.

rhetorical studies defines genre criticism and how it is actually practiced, at least when it comes to rhetorical analysis of horror films.[336] Of course, it is very possible that many of these critics might deny they were performing a genre criticism, preferring to don the mantle of an alternative methodological label and hoping to further sequester the genre critic to the margins of the discipline so that he or she may more fully categorize inaugural addresses. If this is the case, however, might it also be likely that they would deny engaging in genre criticism because the term itself is rife with misunderstandings and perceived limitations? The fact is that most, if not all, of the horror film analysis done in rhetorical studies looks for some "constellation of meaning" between representative artifacts and is therefore, at least partially, a genre criticism. What is important is not the label, but the practice, and the literature suggests that the practice of genre criticism is different from the prescribed methodology. In the next section, I will detail my approach to genre criticism.

FRAME GENRE CRITICISM

In the previous chapter I argued that humans come to know their world through the stories that they tell and that ruptures in those stories can be traumatic. Here, I have reviewed the literature on the horror story and genre criticism. At this point, I want to merge the psychical focus of the former with the textual notions of genre discussed here into an approach that I term a *frame genre criticism*. My hope is that this frame genre

[336] An essay from 2003 does provide an exception to this claim. In it, Barry S. Sapolsky, Fred Molitor, and Sarah Luque revisit the slasher genre to determine if the "new generation" of slasher films in the 1990s differed from their earlier counterparts. They conclude that the "new slashers" ultimately "call into question the validity of key assumptions [regarding] slasher films," in particular the presumption that they "contain 'eroticized or sexualized violence.'" Barry S. Sapolsky, Fred Molitor, and Sarah Luque, "Sex and Violence in Slasher Films: Re-Examining the Assumptions," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 80 (2003): 36. This practice of revisiting a genre and seeing if the traditional assumptions continue to describe new entries into that genre meet with how many scholars of rhetorical studies believe genre criticism "should" be done.

criticism will both reveal characteristics of the culture that produced these artifacts, and help me better understand the rhetorical situations available during the (re)negotiation of a society's discursive reality in the wake of the cultural upheaval of Nine-Eleven. My goal is not to simply categorize the rhetoric, but to understand how the rhetoric circulated through, and was used by, the social body in this time of cultural upheaval. In this way, the concept of the horror "cycle" influenced my frame genre approach in how I came to understand such a diverse collection of texts. I understand the texts analyzed as instrumental in both the constitution of the social body and as part of the criticism itself. As Bawarshi and Reiff explain, "Texts do not *belong* to a genre, as in a taxonomic relation; texts *participate in* a genre, or more accurately, several genres at once."[337] By acknowledging the textual nature of reality and using psychoanalytic theory to inform a reading of competing social discourses negotiating textual reality, I take a different approach from how genre criticism has been traditionally understood in rhetorical studies. I am inspired by Deborah L. Madsen's approach in her book, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre*. She writes,

> Genre theory in the wake of poststructuralism must take the form of a post-essentialist theory. This is only possible if genre is located, not in the text, nor in an abstract definition, but in the discourse that relates text to theory. … Genre theory now needs to recognize that generic difference is represented by a plurality of possible textual forms. And genre criticism needs to recognize that generic definitions can and always will vary – regionally, temporally, and philosophically. Criticism can use any criteria for evaluation that are reasoned and relevant to the textual group under consideration.[338]

For me, genre cannot be limited simply to the text, but must include the text, the rhetorical subject constituted by the text, and the alternate subject positions with which

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[337] Bawarshi and Reiff, *Genre: An Introduction*, 21.
[338] Deborah L. Madsen, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 18.

that constitution competes. The mere existence of patterns between texts does not alone qualify as a genre because the recognition of those patterns is a similar rhetorical construction. As such, my understanding of "genre" lies at the intersection of textual patterns and the conscious recognition of those patterns by a rhetorically constituted subject nested in a particular culture at a particular historical moment. A genre exists when a person understands a discursive reality through the recognition of socially meaningful patterns between texts. In the context of Nine-Eleven and the Abu Ghraib scandal that grounds the case studies, such socially meaningful patterns are initially constructed through the news organizations that report them.

The principle players who tell us the stories of world events and help frame master narratives are the Mainstream News Outlets whose reports become a type of genre in their telling and consumption. For many scholars, our reliance on MNOs to explain the world to us is rooted in the notion that societal structures are so large and complexly interwoven that they become almost invisible to the individual. As such, "it is one of the principal functions of the media to mediate between 'the world outside' and 'the pictures in our heads.'"[339] To tell these grand stories, then, the media often tells smaller stories, intended to dramatize the whole.[340] According to Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, the result of this "narrative logic" directs the news media "to select (consciously or not) a melodramatic format, conforming to an heroic plot line, in their search for mythic

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[339] Toshio Takeshita, "Exploring the Media's Roles in Defining Reality: From Issue-Agenda Setting to Attribute-Agenda Setting," in *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*, eds. Maxwell McCombs, Donald L. Shaw, and David Weaver (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 15.

[340] In the late 1970s, the United States federal government put together a task force to understand the role the media played in telling these "large stories," particularly those that impacted an entire region or the entire nation, like disasters. The task force concluded that, although the impact of the media was varied, one of its primary functions was to dramatize the story and the lessons to be learned from the event. See *Disasters and the Mass Media: Proceedings of the Committee on Disasters and the Mass Media Workshop*, Report by Committee on Disasters and the Mass Media, Commission on Sociotechnical Systems, and National Research Council, (Washington, D. C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1980).

adequacy."[341] In short, each story (regardless of whether it is a TV segment, a newspaper article, or a blog) is told to the audience as a structured narrative and this is true from "fluff pieces" like a water-skiing squirrel to crisis events like Nine-Eleven. As Chyi Hsiang Iris and Maxwell McComb note, "the specific details of news stories obviously change from day to day and from event to event. But the narrative strategies employed in journalistic storytelling are enduring."[342] It is through MNOs that we come to "know" that world. As Mark Slouka notes, many of us are "increasingly removed from experience, overdependent on the representations of reality that come to us through television and the print media, [and] we seem more and more willing to put our trust in intermediaries who 're-present' the world to us."[343]

Recent work in media studies has concluded that the way MNOs frame their narratives matter in how the story is received by a culture.[344] Muschert and Carr argue

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[341] Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, *Nightly Horrors: Crisis Coverage in Television Network News* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 18.

[342] Chyi Hsiang Iris and Maxwell McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing: Coverage of the Columbine School Shootings," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81 (2004): 31. EBSCOhost (13854443).

[343] Mark Slouka, *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 1-2.

[344] Early studies in media framing focused on things like the "issue-attention cycle," which studied how news stories emerged, gained the attention of the public, and then were replaced by new issues that captivated the public's attention. For example, see Anthony Downs, "Up and Down with Ecology: The 'Issue-Attention Cycle'," *Public Interest* (1972). EBSCOhost (45860309). Later studies examined *how* these issues "emerge" (recognizing that "emergent issues" are actually just those the media decides to cover) and the potential for "agenda-setting" in journalism. Wouter van der Brug, Holli Semetko, and Patti Valkenburg note that, "as a result of cognitive limitations, people use only a limited subset of the information stored in their memory. They are more likely to retrieve information from their memory that has been activated recently. So, when making judgments, people are more likely to form those judgments on the basis of recently activated information. … Since citizens rely to a large extent on the mass media for their political information, the media agenda will determine – at least to some extent – what information they will use when making political judgments." Wouter Brug, Holli Semetko, and Patti Valkenburg, "Media Priming in a Multi-Party Context: A Controlled Naturalistic Study in Political Communication," *Political Behavior* 29 (2007): 116. EBSCOhost (24240920). Scholars that looked at the interplay between salience and agenda-setting concluded that two issues primarily dictated public knowledge: time (how long a story was covered) and attention (the prominence a story was given in a particular news cycle). For example, see Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (1972). EBSCOhost (5414703).

that "by selecting and changing frames of coverage among and within news events, mass media producers influence the nature of reality presented to the public."[345] This means that the media often not only tells us *what* is important by the stories they cover (what scholars in media studies term "agenda-setting"), but *how* we should feel about it in the *way they frame* the story.[346] According to Robert Entman, a frame is a selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality [that makes] them more salient in a communicating text."[347] For Kirsten Mogensen, these frames create "a pattern of norms" that constitute a larger "genre."[348] According to Xigen Li, the narrativizing efforts in this genre often goes through distinct frame changes. The first, the descriptive frame, attempts to provide information to the audience and decrease uncertainty about *what* is happening in the event itself. The second, the attributive frame, hopes to make sense out of the event, providing a deeper understanding. And the third, the affective frame, takes the understanding from the attributive frame and projects it long-term.[349] In simple terms, MNO framing evolves from trying to explain *what* is happening to *why* it happened.

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[345] Glenn W. Muschert and Dawn Carr, "Media Salience and Frame Changing across Events: Coverage of Nine School Shootings, 1997-2001," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 83 (2006): 748. EBSCOhost (507940043).

[346] Writing about agenda-setting, Pu-tsung King concludes that "news media have been confirmed to have an agenda-setting function that helps construct the pictures in our head." Pu-tsung King, "The Press, Candidate Images, and Voter Perceptions," in *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*, eds. Maxwell McCombs, Donald L. Shaw, and David Weaver (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 29. And Doris A. Graber argues that, "by suggesting the causes and relationships of events, the media may shape opinions without explicitly telling audiences which views to adopt." Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 7th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2006), 10.

[347] Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 52.

[348] Kirsten Mogensen, "Television Journalism During Terror Attacks," *Media, War & Conflict* 1 (2008): 32. EBSCOhost (53113659).

[349] According to Li, in the early stages of an event, "journalists are likely to report what they observe directly and will produce stories with lower frame sophistication … [As coverage] extends in scope and depth, media frames will go from relatively simple to more sophisticated." Xigen Li, "Stages of a Crisis and Media Frames and Functions: U.S. Television Coverage of the 9/11 Incident During the First 24 Hours," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 51 (2007): 674. EBSCOhost (28791435).

Although studies that examine media frames are not typically thought of as a form of genre criticism, there have been some moves in mass communication to recognize similarities between them. For example, Mogensen argues that MNO coverage of terrorism constitutes "a special terror-related genre within journalism."[350] While frame analysis has enjoyed some popularity in mass communication for several years, it has yet to be taken up by rhetorical studies even though there appears to be substantial overlap that would suggest the potential for a productive rhetorical reading.[351] A frame approach to genre criticism, for example, might be able to emphasize patterns that emerge in cultural discourses that are not wedded to a discrete text without losing the text itself. Put simply, this hybrid approach of frame analysis and genre criticism can allow a critic to

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[350] Mogensen, "Television Journalism," 32. For Mogensen, the generic patterns of terror reporting can be integrated into the existing frames and include rational thinking, sensing, and feeling. "Rational thinking" is the ability of the media to provide timely and correct information to the public to avoid "panic and other forms of suboptimal behavior" and can be integrated with the descriptive frame. Mogensen, "Television Journalism," 37. Adding to the attributive frame, Mogensen offers the concept of "sensing," where MNOs seek to give a sense of the tragedy for those who did not experience the horror directly. From within the affective frame, MNOs can deploy a pattern of "feeling," which refers to the role the coverage can provide comfort to the audience through the reinforcement of social and cultural norms. Moving forward, I will refer to these different frames as "descriptive," "attributive," and "affective," but assume them to integrated with Mogensen's insights. Thus, the descriptive frame attempts to explain what is happening with timely and accurate information to provide a calming influence on the audience, the attributive frame attempts to why the event happened for those who did not experience it directly, and the affective frame attempts to project that understanding long-term by incorporating them into existing master narratives.

[351] For example, John O'Sullivan and Ari Heinonen looked at frames to determine communication patterns between on-line and print newspapers. John O'Sullivan and Ari Heinonen, "Old Values, New Media," *Journalism Practice* 2 (2008). EBSCOhost (34104672). Xigen Li and Zhunag Lin performed a content analysis of advertising on internet sites to outline six dominant American cultural values. Xigen Li and Zhunag Lin, "Cultural Values in Internet Advertising: A Longitudinal Study of the Banner Ads of the Top U.S. Web Sites," *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal* 23 (2007). EBSCOhost (29994745). In political science, Regina Lawrence has used frames to examine media coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal specifically. She argues that, "linking news *frames* to their *institutional context* seems one of the most important directions for future research." Regina G. Lawrence, "Seeing the Whole Board: New Institutional Analysis of News Content," *Political Communication* 23 (2006): 228. EBSCOhost (21320086). In all of these instances, of course, there is a more "empirical" approach to the study; I believe this does not invalidate my approach, but rather is evidence that a rhetorical approach might bring open up new vistas for research. An example of a productive expansion of our understanding of genre criticism in rhetorical studies is Joshua Gunn's incorporation of affect "stabilizing feeling into meaning for the purposes of thought, reflection, and often prediction." Joshua Gunn, "Maranatha," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98 (2012): 379. EBSCOhost (83352148).

examine a series of texts (the genre approach) as it is bound with a cultural discourse (the frame approach). It is possible to think of frame genre criticism in this way: the genre portion looks at texts as the frame portion looks at the larger discourses. With this in mind, let us know turn our attention to those larger discourses as manifested in the master narrative.

A master narrative, by its very nature, is a conglomeration of a massive number of texts held together by a cultural "script." In addition to the traditional problems facing any genre criticism in rhetorical studies, this project takes on an additional burden of hoping to look for a constellation of meaning between the hundreds of disparate texts that write the "script" to the master narrative. Frame analysis alone is rather limited in its rhetorical use as it typically omits affective dimensions and has been limited in its application to news reports. Genre criticism, on the other hand, seems to track feelings, but, in many cases, is tied to discrete texts (such as a film or a group of speeches, but not a cultural discourse). Although these two approaches alone are limited in their usefulness for a project such as this one, I believe that, taken together, they offer a systematic vocabulary for the analysis of hundreds of texts that have crystallized into a cultural moment, where "the instabilities and contradictions appear at almost every point of the social formation and when the struggles become visible and self-conscious."[352] With an eye towards horror, the cultural moment is marked by the emergence of the monster and can be the locus of academic interrogation. Stephen Prince writes,

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[352] Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 41. Grossberg asks that cultural critics perform what he terms a "conjunctural analysis" to "provide a history of the present, to tell a better story about what's going on, and to begin to open new possibilities for imagination and struggle." Grossberg, *Cultural Studies*, 67. Although my frame genre criticism is not methodologically a conjunctural analysis as Grossberg describes it, the guiding force of this project – to better understand how affective fear impacts the rhetorical situations used to negotiate national identity in times of cultural upheaval – I would argue that it follows Grossberg's spirit.

> Monsters today seem to be everywhere, and they cannot be destroyed. Our sense of being under threat seems unrelenting. Passengers on commercial airliners nervously eye one another. Perhaps one will try to light a bomb fuse in his shoe. … To the extent that we inhabit today a culture of fear, which finds threats of decay and destruction at every turn, the horror film offers confirmation of this zeitgeist. It tells us that our belief in security is a delusion, that the monsters are all around us, and that we, the inhabitants of this collective nightmare, are just so much meat awaiting slaughter. … The horror film, then, is our most contemporary of genres and perhaps the one that speaks in the most urgent and insistent way to its viewers.[353]

Horror stories permeate our culture, from the news coverage of Nine-Eleven, to the outcry surrounding Abu Ghraib, to Jigsaw in the *Saw* franchise. The constellation of meanings generated between and among horror stories allow us insight into ourselves and both reveals and (re)creates the apparatus of what scares us. I believe that what I'm calling a frame genre criticism allows the opportunity to examine the disparate horror stories we tell at the level of discourse, which is the level of culture.

Given the near countless number of things that have been written about Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib, there is almost no way to account for it all. For this project, I read over 250 newspaper reports to get a sense of consistencies and variations among the Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib narratives, keying specifically to nationally consumed outlets such as CNN, the Associated Press, and Reuters News Service. I read each article and viewed each broadcast according to the methods of close reading, which Barry Brummett defines as a "mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings."[354] Specifically, I worked inductively examining coverage

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[353] Stephen Prince, "Introduction," in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 4.

[354] Barry Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2010), 3. When discussing how a critic might engage in a close reading of genre specifically, Brummett defines genre as "*a recurring type of narrative*" which may "call up one genre or another [signaling to] the audience to activate some of their expectations but not others." Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading*, 63-64. *Emphasis in original*. This focus on pattern and the activation of expectations in an audience (as read through reactions) is consistent with the methodology of this project.

of the event, packaging the multitude of stories into frames, and looking to see if patterns emerged that might form a constellation of meaning. After examining the MNO reports (the findings of which are reported in chapter three), I performed a rhetorical criticism of three case studies, comprised of 20 films, using the same close reading techniques and then looked to see what the patterns between such disparate cultural artifacts (governmental discourse, MNO discourse, and popular culture discourse) might suggest about master narratives in times of social upheaval.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I provided an overview of genre studies, surveyed the literature of horror films in rhetorical studies and explained rhetorical method I used for the case studies that follow. In the previous chapter, I outlined the psychoanalytic theory that will guide this project; I move forward now with the understanding that genre and psychoanalysis are two complementary parts of a whole. Psychoanalysis provides a vocabulary for explaining the affective motor behind the generation of narratives while frames and genre approach these narratives from the opposite direction, showing how patterns develop over time. In the horror genre, the story is constrained only by what will frighten its audience. As such, it is a constantly evolving genre that, when bracketed off as a cycle, can often provide framed insight into what horrifies a society in a given context and provide a rich corpus for academic inquiry into the rhetorical strategies used in times of cultural upheaval. The question that lingers, however, is how the social body reconciles a narrativized fear that refuses incorporation. What happens when our social identity becomes dislodged? In the next chapter, I will begin to take up this and related questions and provide an account of the Nine-Eleven master narrative and how the American social identity was challenged by the Abu Ghraib scandal.

Chapter 3

A Story of Trauma: The Nine-Eleven Narrative and Abu Ghraib

Arguably no event since the turn of the century has had more of an impact on the United States than the events of September 11, 2001.[355] In the immediate aftermath, much of the nation united behind a dominant narrative of the events and, even though many Americans disagreed with the policies of the Bush administration, the narrative itself maintained a cultural fidelity for several years. It wasn't until the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison became public knowledge in May of 2004 that the narrative began to rupture. Although the question of torture had been part of the public debate since early 2002, it was something that the American public could dismiss or ignore until the photographic evidence at Abu Ghraib emerged. In the face of this traumatic evidence, many were no longer able to ignore the questions of torture and were forced to finally confront the rift in the master narrative; after evidence of government-sponsored torture emerged, the dominant story of Nine Eleven no longer made sense for many.

In this chapter, I will outline the emergence and construction of the Nine-Eleven master narrative and how the Abu Ghraib torture scandal complicated and contradicted it. Although most readers could retell the Nine-Eleven master narrative – the country was the victim of an unprovoked attack, heroes respond in the face of danger, the United States military responds in the name of justice, and so on – its construction was more

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[355] I don't think it is overly ambitious claim to argue that Nine-Eleven had a substantial effect on the American social body. Providing evidence for the scope of its impact, it is estimated that over 420,000 New Yorkers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the attacks. Further, during the 2001 holiday season, 1.4 million Americans changed their travel plans from an airplane to some form of ground transportation, providing evidence that the impact was felt beyond the borders of New York City. See "9/11 by the Numbers," New York Magazine, 2002, accessed May 15, 2012, http://nymag.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm.

complex. A detailed analysis of the construction of the Nine-Eleven master narrative will help us better understand how the use of structured storytelling and narrative themes assisted the American social body with internalizing a master narrative. Such necessary groundwork will provide a baseline for the rhetorical analysis to follow by establishing the prevailing master narrative and the primary challenge to it in the Abu Ghraib counter-narrative. This baseline will then act as a touchstone for our discussion of the cinematic texts that were born from the master narrative and counter-narrative. To this end, I will first employ a close textual reading through the three common frames used by the news media (descriptive, attributive, and affective) to map structural and thematic patterns that emerge in the telling of the Nine-Eleven master narrative. Then I will look at three different mediated reactions to the Abu Ghraib scandal and look to see if similar structural and thematic patterns emerge in the framing of news stories about torture.

THE NINE-ELEVEN MASTER NARRATIVE

In an article by Emily Sohn that explains how the Nine-Eleven narrative is told, and will be (re)told, Jewish studies scholar Alvin Rosenfeld argues that there is an historical tendency for Americans to give every story a happy ending; he predicts that the Nine-Eleven narrative will ultimately become a tale of unending hope.[356] In the same article, however, historian Gavriel Rosenfeld contends that it is impossible to know how Nine-Eleven will be remembered because we are still in the process of writing the story and there is often a distinct difference between "true" history and cultural memory. For him, "the events of September 11, 2001, may have introduced a spike into [Americans'] eternally sunny disposition."[357] Rosenfeld considers the possibility that there may be no

[356] Emily Sohn, "How Should We Remember 9/11?," Discovery News, September 2, 2011, accessed April 12, 2012, http://news.discovery.com/history/september-11-remembrance-110902.html.
[357] Sohn, "How Should We Remember 9/11?", par. 10.

happy ending to the Nine-Eleven story and that America may have entered into a new cultural era – one that is darker and dominated by pessimism. Although it may be impossible to know how the story will be told in the future, we can look back and see how the story has been told thus far.

When looking at genres, a critic is able to look at a selection of texts for a constellation of meaning. When discussing master narratives, however, we are talking about a cultural story comprised of thousands of texts. One way in which critics have contended with the patterns in a large number of texts has been to analyze them through frames – selections of reality presented to understand the world. As I discussed in the previous chapter, traditionally, three major frames have been used in the analysis of media texts. The first, the descriptive frame, examines the event itself – the what happened. The second, the attributive frame, begins to assign meaning to the event; if the descriptive frame provides the "what," the attributive frame begins to supply the "why." The last, the affective frame, expands the "why" of the attributive frame long-term and engages larger affective and philosophical attributions of meaning, often in relation to existing cultural norms and narratives. The hybrid approach of frame genre criticism employed here works dialectically between the critical approaches of genre and frame analysis, moving between a close reading of texts and cultural discourses to illuminate a larger cultural understanding.

Nine-Eleven: The descriptive frame

The descriptive frame attempts to provide information about what is happening in the event itself.[358] The Nine-Eleven event begins when the hijackers pass through

[358] It is important to remember that the descriptive frame does not provide a universal Truth, but a cultural truth as understood through the MNOs. Although there can be multiple understandings of "what happened" on September 11, 2001, the American Nine-Eleven master narrative can be culturally understood through the National 9/11 Memorial, which has become the "official" designation of "what

security screening at 5:45 am. At 7:59 am, American Airlines Flight 11 takes off, bound for Los Angeles. At 8:00 am, "the Peace Corps schedules an information session … in their offices at 6 World Trade Center."[359] At 8:14 am, United Airlines Flight 175 takes off from Logan airport and, at 8:20 am, American Airlines Flight 77 takes off from Washington Dulles. At 8:24 am, Mohammed Atta, hijacker on board American 11, attempts to speak to the plane's cabin, but accidentally contacts air traffic control instead. He says, "We have some planes. Just stay quiet and you will be okay." The air traffic controller who received the transmission, Peter Zalewski, contacts the military at 8:37 am

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happened." According to Erika Doss, "memorials are ideal teaching tools in terms of considering how, and why, cultural memory is created, and how it shapes local and national identity." Erika Doss, "Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory," *OAH Magazine of History* 25 (2011): 27. EBSCOhost. An estimated seven million people will visit the National 9/11 Memorial annually, which will "shape and define 9/11's historial meaning for decades to come." Doss, "Remembering 9/11," 30. The event and time designations here are taken from the "official timeline" at the National 9/11 Memorial. "September 11 Attack Timeline," The 9/11 Memorial, 2012, accessed May 15, 2012, http://timeline.national911memorial.org/#/Explore/2. Memorials are important in the construction of public memory. According to Shari Veil, Timothy Sellnow, and Megan Heald, "from a rhetorical perspective, memorializing includes the development of symbols that relate the event itself to the act of keeping it in the public memory." Shari R. Veil, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Megan Heald, "Memorializing Crisis: The Oklahoma City National Memorial as Renewal Discourse," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 39 (2011): 166. EBSCOhost (59836044). For Billie Pivnick, the 9/11 Memorial is more than a structure, but a place of memorializing and "an act that involves shared memory and collective grieving." Billie Pivnick, "Enacting Remembrance: Turning Toward Memorializing September 11th," *Journal of Religion & Health* 50 (2011): 500. EBSCOhost (65322641).

[359] It is interesting that this bit of information makes its way into the formal timeline. As the web site notes, "WTC 6 is dwarfed by the 110-story Twin Towers. In addition to the signature pair of towers, the seven-building office complex also contains a hotel, a customs house, an underground mall, street level shops, a major commuter train hub, and 12 million square feet of office space." Presumably, this section is to inform the reader that the World Trade Center was more than just the Twin Towers, but there is no indication that the other buildings were the site of any of the fatalities and there is no further mention of these buildings or events except as an additional obstacle with the primary rescue effort. (The Secret Service evacuated the New York City Office of Emergency Management in 7 WTC at 9:30 am and the rest of the building shortly thereafter. Lack of water throughout the day meant that the fire department was unable to stop the building from burning and it collapsed nearly eight hours later. There were no casualties, but the debris from the collapse did hamper ongoing rescue efforts, the web site notes.) Further, of the arguably thousands of events/stories that could have been chosen to represent the 12 million square feet of "other space," the Memorial chose to highlight the information session of the Peace Corps. This helps solidify the narrative that the United States was a peaceful nation attacked without provocation. To be clear, the web site does include other events that were scheduled to take place in this section (such as an 11:20 presentation on "Accelerating Your eTrading Strategy"), but the front page is dedicated to the Peace Corps recruiting efforts.

and Air National Guard jets are scrambled to locate and tail American 11. At 8:42, United Airlines Flight 93 takes off from Newark International Airport. At 8:46 am, American 11 crashes into floors 93-99 of the World Trade Center's North Tower. At this point, public information is limited and the media is still unsure what is happening; for example, New York City traffic reporter for WCBS Radio 880, Tom Kaminsky, who was in the station's helicopter at the time, only reported, "whatever has occurred has just occurred, within minutes, and we are trying to determine exactly what that is. But currently, we have a lot of smoke at the top of the Towers of the World Trade Center."[360] At 8:46 am, emergency services are mobilized and President Bush is alerted at 8:50 am that a plane has hit the World Trade Center, though, at this point, it is still believed to be a small passenger plane.

At 9:03 am, CNN broadcasts live footage of United 175 crashing into floors 77-85 of the South Tower.[361] CNN anchor Aaron Brown is speaking with eyewitness Winston Mitchell at the time. The camera is trained on the North Tower as Mitchell is attempting to describe the damage. "I'd say the hole takes about, it looks like six or seven floors are taken out," he says as United 175 enters the frame and smashes into the South Tower. Brown calmly interrupts at the moment of impact and says, "Hold on just a moment, we've got an explosion inside." As screams are heard in the background, Mitchell, noticeably more anxious, but still relatively collected says, "The building's exploding right now, you've got people running up the street. Hold on, I'll tell you what's going on." At this point, both Brown and Mitchell believe that the explosion came from the

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[360] Tom Kaminsky, "WCBS Report," The 9/11 Memorial, September 11, 2001, accessed May 15, 2012, http://timeline.national911memorial.org/#/Explore/2/AudioEntry/3.

[361] CNN is not the only television station to broadcast United 175 crashing into the South Tower, however, my descriptions are in reference to that broadcast. *Breaking News*, anchored by Aaron Brown (2001; Atlanta: Cable News Network, September 11), Television Broadcast.

airplane in the North Tower. After a few moments, Brown is told about the second plane and says, "We're getting word that perhaps" before he is interrupted by Mitchell, who says, "okay, hold on, the people here are, uh, everybody's panicking." Brown then attempts to put Mitchell on hold and says, "I just don't want to panic, here, on the air." A few moments later Brown says, "One of our producers said perhaps a second plane was involved. And let's not even speculate to that point, but let's put it out there that perhaps that may have happened." For the next minute, Brown simply summarizes what is known at the time, that they believe a passenger plane has flown into the North Tower, and describes the visual images being projected. He also asks the producer if they may have contact with an eyewitness who "perhaps sees better than we do from these pictures." Three minutes after the crash, at 9:06 am, CNN replays the video that shows United 175 hitting the South Tower. Brown, calling the images "frightening indeed," is calm throughout the broadcast and was, at one point, content to devote an entire minute of the broadcast to describing the pictures on the screen.[362] For his efforts, Brown was given the Edward R. Murrow Award "honoring outstanding achievements in electronic journalism."[363]

Nine-Eleven: The attributive frame

While the descriptive frame tells the audience *what* is happening, the attributive frame attempts to bring a deeper understanding of an event to an audience beyond the facts – it is the first step in giving meaning to an event. When looking at the Nine-Eleven narrative more closely, two themes emerge in the attributive frame: the move to action

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[362] Brown illustrates both the "descriptive frame" and "rational thinking" in terror reporting; his primary focus was to provide factual information as it occurred to, presumably, calm the public. As Graber notes, "Information about crises, even if it conveys bad news, relieves disquieting uncertainty and calms people." Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 134.

[363] "Edward R. Murrow Awards," Radio Television Digital News Association, 2012, accessed May 18, 2012, http://www.rtdna.org/pages/awards.php?g=67.

and the missing body.[364] The first theme, the move to action, is also a denial of passivity. At 9:10 am, additional emergency personnel were organized and many off-duty and volunteer rescue workers made their way to ground zero to help.[365] Unsure of what was unfolding around them and oblivious as to what they might find on the upper floors, rescuers pushed upwards into the buildings. South Tower survivor, Connie Labetti recalls,

> It was probably around the 40th floor when the firefighters started to come up and I remember thinking, 'they're going to climb all the way up to 80? How are they going to do that?' … A few people would shout out [things], giving them information, but they were just stone-faced, staring straight ahead without showing much emotion. I couldn't imagine these firefighters going up to Lord knows what.[366]

At 9:42 am, the Federal Aviation Authority closed the U.S. airspace, grounded all flights, and, minutes later, the White House and Capitol building were evacuated. At 9:57 am, 13 of the passengers and crew aboard United 93 contacted people on the ground and at least six of them learned about the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. This information is believed to have been the impetus for the passengers to mount a counterattack against the hijackers. At 10:03 am, the hijackers crash United 93 into a field in Pennsylvania, killing everyone on-board.

The jumpers are another example of the move to action theme. For many, the video and photographs of people jumping from the upper floors of the World Trade Center are burned into the social memory. Survivor Florence Jones, who worked on the 77th floor of the South Tower remembers asking herself, "am I going to have to jump

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[364] My outline of the descriptive frame was taken primarily from the National 9/11 Memorial's timeline and the CNN broadcast from the morning of September 11, 2001. My outline of the attributive and affective frames uses those same sources, but also includes a close reading of approximately 150 news articles.

[365] As in the previous section, these time marks come from the "official" timeline at the national memorial.

[366] Connie Labetti, "Evacuation of the World Trade Center," The 9/11 Memorial, 2012, accessed May 15, 2012, http://timeline.national911memorial.org/#/Explore/2/AudioEntry/28.

because I wasn't going to wait for the firemen? Am I going to have to do what I just saw people doing?"[367] The photographs were particularly powerful; in their discussion of the iconic "Falling Man" photograph, Tom Junod and Andrew Chaikivsky write that "there is something almost rebellious in the man's posture, has though once faced with the inevitability of death, he decided to get on with it; as though he were a missile, a spear, bent on attaining his own end."[368] The Falling Man photograph captured the American public's attention because it embraced action and denied passivity. Of course, this image is just a snapshot in time and it was only this one photograph out of twelve that were taken in which he "fell in such a dignified, controlled manner. [According to photographer Richard Drew], in the other eleven photos 'he fell like everyone else, like all the other jumpers trying to hold on to the life he was leaving, which is to say that he fell desperately.'"[369] Those images (of his desperate fall), however, are not the ones that tell the Nine-Eleven narrative. The narrative is imbued with the theme of bravery through action.

A second theme that emerged from the attributive frame was the missing body. In the immediate aftermath of the towers collapsing, many people believed that their loved ones were still alive and were just missing. It was reported that firefighters and rescue workers had "disappeared as they strove to extricate the injured before the towers fell."[370] At 12:30 pm, fourteen people emerge from the debris, having survived the collapse of the North Tower, and provided hope that the continuing rescue efforts would turn up more

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[367] Florence Jones, "Evacuation of the World Trade Center," The 9/11 Memorial, 2012, accessed May 15, 2012, http://timeline.national911memorial.org/#/Explore/2/AudioEntry/270.
[368] Tom Junod and Andrew Chaikivsky, "The Falling Man," *Esquire* 140 (2003): 177. EBSCOhost (10530894).
[369] Rodica Mihaila, "Falling Man Tropes and the New Cycle of Vision in the Recent American Novel," *Writing Technologies* 3 (2010): 87.
[370] "Huge Death Toll Feared After Terrorist Attacks in US," *Agence France Presse*, September 12, 2001, Domestic section. LexisNexis.

survivors. More hope was provided with the rescue of Pasquale Buzzelli at 3:00 pm, and again at 8:00 pm, when rescue teams found Port Authority Police Department Sergeant John McLoughlin and Officer William Jimeno. Alexis Chiu wrote, "Driven by shock, frustration and desperation, the loved ones of thousands who disappeared when the twin towers fell from Manhattan's skyline Tuesday have swarmed the city ever since."[371] All told, twenty people were rescued alive and the last survivor to be pulled from the rubble was Genelle Guzman-McMillan on the morning of September 12.[372]

As time passed, however, it became increasingly clear that the rush to find survivors had now become a mission to recover the bodies of the dead. One week after the attacks, Hugh Dougherty reported, "the number of missing people last night climbed to 5,422, with just 218 bodies found at what is now known as ground zero, of which 152 have been identified."[373] For the survivors of those who had loved ones "go missing" in the attacks, it was important that the bodies be recovered. Even five months after the collapse of the World Trade Center, bodies were still being unearthed. Sergeant Kevin Devlin described the process of recovering the bodies of six of his Port Authority colleagues:

> They were in the process of using hand tools to dig around the area against the west wall of One World Trade. And immediately we went down and started assisting. They were cutting away rebar and scrap metal and everything to get where Kathy [the captain of the team] was and where, subsequently, we found other police officers and then a civilian. … It all had to be done by hand. We couldn't use any machines, so we were using hand rakes, we had a rebar cutter, K12 saw and the saws all to cut through metal and whatever we needed moved. … The notion that we were going to be able to get her out and get the rest of them

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[371] Alexis Chiu, "At least 4,998 Dead, Missing Families Walk N.Y.'s Streets in Search for the Lost," *San Jose Mercury News*, September 14, 2001, Front section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[372] Matthew Shaer, "Survivor, Last Pulled Out," New York Magazine - The Encyclopedia of 9/11, August 27, 2011, accessed May 15, 2012, http://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/last-survivor/.
[373] Hugh Dougherty, "Hope Fades in Search for Twin Towers Survivors," *Press Association*, September 18, 2001, Home section. LexisNexis.

> out, that her husband, Chris, and her family will have her back and have a proper burial – that's a big motivator."[374]

Devlin makes special mention that "it all had to be done by hand." For him, even though the officers had been dead for months, the extraction of the remains had to be done very carefully to retain what bodily integrity was left. For others who died that day, however, there was no remaining bodily integrity at all. Of the 2,749 people who died in the World Trade Center, 1,150 have never been found and still considered "missing."[375] Some of them were most likely incinerated in the extreme heat of the explosion and subsequent fire, while others might have been part of remains that were located but could not be identified. In many of these cases, physical totems replaced the missing body, such as New York City firefighter Richard Muldowney whose wife was given a "9/11 Heroes Medal of Valor from the White House … to remember Richie."[376] In all of these instances, the missing body marked that something had gone wrong and needed to be recovered in an effort to heal the psychological wounds.

In addition to the missing bodies of ground zero, millions of others were displaced globally as a result of the attacks. Nearly half an hour after the collapse of the second tower, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani called for the complete evacuation of lower Manhattan, which included over 1 million residents.[377] Almost an hour later, at 12:16 pm, the American airspace was cleared, leaving over 500,000 domestic travelers

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[374] Kevin Devlin, "Interview: Sergeant Kevin Devlin Talks About Recovering the Bodies of Six Port Authority Police Officers from Ground Zero," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio (February 11, 2002). EBSCOhost.
[375] Alison Gendar, "9/11 Bodies Discovered - New Pain at Ground Zero," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 16, 2006, World section, 1 - State edition. EBSCOhost.
[376] Justin George and Rebecca Catalanello, "Honors Anew for 9/11 Valor," *St. Petersburg Times*, September 11, 2009, Tampa Bay section, Tampa edition. LexisNexis.
[377] Tara Burghart, "World Trade Center Attack Paralyzes New York and Thousands Take to the Streets," *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*, September 11, 2001, State and Regional section. LexisNexis.

stranded and local authorities struggling to provide ad-hoc food and shelter.[378] Hundreds of thousands more were "stranded around the world" as the United States closed its border.[379] In this time of national crisis, millions of Americans just wanted to "go home," but couldn't.[380] Although it is tempting to dismiss these feelings in light of what others experienced on that day, physical displacement itself can be a terrifying and traumatizing experience.[381] In the telling of the Nine-Eleven narrative, millions of bodies were "lost" or "missing."[382]

Nine-Eleven: The affective frame

The affective frame shapes how narratives are understood in a larger context and can provide comfort to an audience by reinforcing cultural norms.[383] This framing began with President Bush's televised address to the nation on the day of the attacks. He reminded us of the victims: "Moms and dads. Friends and neighbors. … [who were] targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the

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[378] "American Airspace Cleared," The 9/11 Memorial, 2012, accessed May 15, 2012, http://timeline.national911memorial.org/#/Explore/2.
[379] Jo Biddle, "Hundreds of Thousands of Stranded Travellers Await Flights," *Agence France Presse*, September 13, 2001, International News section. LexisNexis.
[380] Karen Gram and Jim Beatty, "A Horrible, Horrible, Bloody Mess," *The Vancouver Sun*, September 12, 2001, News section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[381] This is especially true when one is continually reminded of the event that caused the displacement, which would almost certainly be the case following Nine-Eleven. See Kevin Becker, Guy Sapirstein, and Jeffrey Weir, *Psychological Support for Survivors of Disaster: A Practical Guide* (Armonk: IBM Corporate Citizenship & Corporate Affairs, 2008).
[382] In the Nine-Eleven narrative, the missing body is a signifier of the traumatic event, which can be understood through the language many media reports used to describe the death toll from September 11. As Eliecer Crespo Fernández explains, humans often use euphemisms when discussing death to provide "a way to speak about the taboo, that is, about the unspeakable." Eliecer Crespo Fernández, "The Language of Death: Euphemism and Cultural Metaphorization in Victorian Obituaries," *SKY Journal of Linguistics* 19 (2006): 102. We replace the word "death" with "pass away," for example, and replace the act of "dying" with "a journey to a better place." In the Nine-Eleven narrative, the word that is used repeatedly as a euphemism for "died" is "lost."[382] In the telling of the Nine-Eleven narrative, the theme of the missing body made its way into how we spoke about the unspeakable – on that day, many were "lost."
[383] Li, "Stages of a Crisis."

world."[384] He recounted the struggles our heroes fought to overcome as they moved to action: "we responded with the best of America, with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could."[385] And he foreshadowed what was to come: "The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts."[386] Bush's use of the word "evil" in describing the hijackers carried with it an enormous moral weight and helped put the Nine-Eleven narrative in a grander social context.[387] Kirsten Mogensen argued that, "Viewers can be inspired following a terror attack by seeing that their leadership and fellow citizens behave in accordance with the moral norms of the society. … National leaders, rescue workers and ordinary citizens reinforced social norms through their own examples."[388] In his televised address to Congress on September 20, 2001, Bush announced the "War on Terror," claiming that, "our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped

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[384] George W. Bush, "Text of Bush's Address on 9/11," CNN, September 11, 2001, accessed May 17, 2012, http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text_1_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?_s=PM:US, par. 3, 8.

[385] Bush, "Address on 9/11", par. 9.

[386] Bush, "Address on 9/11", par. 13.

[387] This reference to "evil" would take on an even greater significance in Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, in which he coined the phrase "axis of evil" to describe the nation-states targeted in the first phase of the War on Terror. This use of the word "evil" to carry a moral weight harkens back to one of Ronald Reagan's most famous addresses, his "Evil Empire" speech. Its use also seems to serve a similar function for Bush as it did for Reagan. As Thomas Goodnight explained in his analysis of Reagan's speech, "Spiritual transformation is accomplished by defining American destiny as dependent upon recognition and fulfillment of moral character. … The view of persuasion … seems vaguely Augustinian insofar as it gives the evildoers an opportunity for conversion. Should conversion fail, then Americans are destined to combat the forces of evil." G. Thomas Goodnight, "Ronald Reagan's Re-formulation of the Rhetoric of War: Analysis of the 'Zero Option,' 'Evil Empire,' and 'Star Wars' Addresses," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 401. EBSCOhost (9938339). Bush provides the same option for conversion – they can repent and be "with us" or refuse and be "against us," which justifies their extermination. Use of the word "evil" provides a moral cover, which simultaneously works to unify the public and provide cover against criticism.

[388] Mogensen, "Television Journalism," 42.

and defeated."[389] In this speech, Bush used the groundswell of support he had both domestically and internationally to plant the seeds for justifying pre-emptive military strikes against potential threats.[390] He proclaimed that, "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."[391]

As the Bush administration worked to construct the Nine-Eleven narrative for both a domestic and international audience, the domestic MNOs provided almost unwavering loyalty in its news coverage.[392] Matt Carlson argued that, like many

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[389] George W. Bush, "Transcript of President Bush's Address to Congress," CNN, September 20, 2001, accessed May 12, 2012, http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/us/gen.bush.transcript_1_joint-session-national-anthem-citizens/4?_s=PM:US, par. 2-5.

[390] Although international support would wane quickly as the War on Terror unfolded, it is important to remember that there was an outpouring of global goodwill in the immediate aftermath of the attacks and this provided a worldwide context for the affective frame. The official statements from Britain, Vatican City and Egypt all described the people of the United States as "innocent;" China, Germany, Mexico, and Iran called the United States a "victim;" Israel pledged support to the "good" people of the U.S. against the "evil [of] the bloodthirsty;" Canada found it "impossible to fully comprehend the evil that would have conjured up such a cowardly and depraved assault;" Columbia similarly found it "cowardly and villainous;" Japan said "vicious act of violence against the United States [was] unforgivable;" the foreign ministers of the European Union said the attack was "against humanity itself and the values of freedom;" while the United Nations "condemn[ed] utterly" the "attacks."[390] Most interesting was the international support the United States received from traditional adversaries: Russia said the attack was "a blatant challenge to humanity;" North Korea called the attack "tragic;" Libya said the attacks were "horrifying" and asked for international assistance "regardless of political considerations or differences;" Syria expressed sorrow; Iran said it felt "deep regret and sympathy with the victims;" Pakistan condemned the attack as a "modern day evil;" and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat "completely condemn[ed]" the action. "In Their Own Words," accessed November 11, 2011, http://www.september11news.com/InternationalReaction.htm. According to the webpage that compiled these statements, they were all either the official statements issued by the governments or the leaders of the respective nations at the time.

[391] Bush, "Address to Congress", par. 3.

[392] Criticisms of the media's acquiescence to the administration can be found as early as January of 2002. George E. Curry, editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service, argued that the mainstream media has tarnished its credibility by allowing [Bush] … to reinvent [his] public image by wrapping [himself] in the American flag." He concludes, "Given Bush's popularity, it is imperative that the media serve as a watchdog over government excesses, rather than be an apologizing lapdog." George E. Curry, "Media Switches From 'Watchdog' to 'Lapdog.'," *New York Amsterdam News* 93 (2002): 13. EBSCOhost (5902325). An example of the media failing in its "watchdog" role will be covered in the next section

Americans, "journalists were consumed with the fear that there might be a terrorist attack they hadn't anticipated, and that there were Al Qaeda sleeper cells crawling around Europe."[393] The MNOs reminded us over and over again: everything had changed on the morning of September 11, 2001.[394] Together, the Bush administration and the MNOs worked to rhetorically constitute an American social body to co-create the new reality of a "post-Nine-Eleven world." Nimmo and Combs argue that the telling and re-telling of these types of narratives creates "a real-fiction contributing to the emergence of a symbolic reality created and transmitted by newsmaking, interpreted and shared by large audiences."[395] This version of the Nine-Eleven narrative concluded on May 1, 2003. Following 21 days of combat operations in Iraq, United States led coalition forces captured Baghdad and removed Saddam Hussein from power. Dressed in a Naval flight suit and standing in front of a giant banner that read "Mission Accomplished," Bush addressed the crew of the USS Abraham Lincoln from the deck of the aircraft carrier. "In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed," he announced. "In this battle, we have fought for the cause of liberty and for the peace of the world. … Because of you, our nation is more secure. Because of you, the tyrant has fallen, and Iraq is free."[396] For the Nine-Eleven master narrative, this military victory brought closure to the story and solidified the master narrative.

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when I detail the media's refusal to push the question of torture until presented with actual photographic evidence from Abu Ghraib.

[393] Raymond Bonner, "The Media and 9/11: How We Did," The Atlantic, September 9, 2011, accessed May 2, 2012, www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/09/the-media-and-9-11-how-we-did/244818/, par. 7.

[394] There are literally thousands of articles in the months following Nine-Eleven that claimed the world had fundamentally changed. As an example of how ubiquitous this claim had become, an article by Marty Abrams opened with "While it may sound trite, it's true: The world changed forever on Sept. 11. Our society underwent a fundamental change." Marty Abrams, "Privacy in the New America," *Direct*, November 1, 2001, Special Report section. LexisNexis.

[395] Nimmo and Combs, *Nightly Horrors*, 18.

[396] George W. Bush, "A Crucial Advance in the Campaign Against Terror," The Guardian, May 1, 2003, accessed May 12, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/may/01/usa.iraq, par. 1.

In this section, I outlined the construction of the Nine-Eleven narrative through the three frames used by MNO coverage. Early in the event, the coverage focused on a factual representation of what was occurring: who launched the attack, who was directly effected, and what the immediate impact was. As time moved forward, the narrative began to provide meaning to the event and granted agency to a wide swath of people, from rescue workers to the jumpers who took matters into their own hands. As this narrative was being constructed, two themes emerged to solidify the story: the move to action and the missing body. After the conclusion of the event, this meaning was projected long term: the nation was united by the heroism of those that sacrificed themselves, the United States was on the moral side of right, and we would hunt down and destroy the evil-doers who attacked us without provocation. This master narrative went virtually unchallenged in the immediate aftermath of Nine-Eleven, but in the year following the "Mission Accomplished" speech, several events threatened the consistency of the narrative. First, the combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan continued and public support for the war quickly began to disappear.[397] Second, the outpouring of international support the United States received immediately following the attacks had quickly dissipated.[398] And, third, more and more unsettling stories were surfacing about the treatment of prisoners in facilities like Guantanamo Bay.[399] All of these traumatically converged in April of 2004 with the story of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and the

[397] Bob Deans and Scott Shepard, "President Defends Iraq Policy in Face of Waning Public Support," *Cox News Service*, April 13, 2004, News section. LexisNexis.
[398] Robert T. Grey, "Bush Should've Taken His Father's Advice on War," *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 13, 2003, Editorial section. LexisNexis.
[399] Colin Fernandez, "How I Was Humiliated and Tortured in Camp X-Ray," *Daily Mail*, March 12, 2004. Lexis/Nexis.

photographs that "introduced the world to devastating scenes of torture and suffering inside the decrepit prison in Iraq."[400]

THE TRAUMA OF ABU GHRAIB

A central thread throughout this project is that we understand our world through stories and, more specifically, through the themes of stories. This reliance on storytelling not only implicates the creation of personal and national identity, but it is important when those identities are threatened by a traumatic event. Freud, for example, argued that the effective handling of trauma in a clinical setting required the ability of an analyst to read the structure of a patient's symptom (which is a construction as an adaptive response).[401] The encounter with the Real is at least partially traumatic in that it disrupts our fantasies and narratives.[402] Prior to the Abu Ghraib scandal, however, there were few structured stories of torture in the War on Terror.

In early January of 2002, a handful of articles expressed concern regarding the legal ramifications of calling them "detainees" rather than "Prisoners of War," effectively denying them protection under the Geneva Convention.[403] Later that month, after Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had bestowed the official label of "unlawful combatants" on the prisoners, some international reports questioned the conditions of the facilities being used and the forms of detention.[404] Although the domestic news coverage was almost entirely devoid of such reports, some Americans were beginning to question

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[400] "Abu Ghraib Files," Salon, March 14, 2006, accessed May 15, 2012, http://www.salon.com/2006/03/14/introduction_2/, par. 1.
[401] As an example, see Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 6-11.
[402] This would also help explain the belated nature of trauma – the event itself is not traumatic until it refuses to fit into our prefigured life stories.
[403] Peter Beaumont, "Without Prejudice: American Can't," *The Observer*, January 13, 2002, News section. LexisNexis.
[404] Adam Roberts, "Even Our Enemies Have Rights," *The Independent*, January 20, 2002, Comment section, Sunday edition. LexisNexis.

the interrogation procedures being used by the U.S. government. In February of 2002, U.S. General Mike Lehnert assured reporters that the interrogation was humane; he said, "there is no torture, whips, there are no bright lights, drugging. We are a nation of laws."[405] Two days later, however, the European human rights group Amnesty International expressed concerns of potential torture, citing reports of sensory deprivation, unnecessary restraint and humiliation techniques.[406] This is not to say, of course, that the domestic media was entirely silent on the issue. A March 2002 article in *The Washington Post*, for example, reported that the United States was potentially engaging in "aggressive interrogation techniques" and might be sending prisoners to other nations to be tortured (a process called extraordinary rendition).[407] This coverage was the exception to the rule, however, and the general consensus among scholars now is that, in the early years following September 11, the U.S. media failed to be a watchdog against torture.[408] That changed in May of 2004, however, when *The New Yorker* published Seymour Hersh's article (with graphic photographs included) detailing the events at Abu Ghraib.[409] According to Douglas Johnson, "the American public and the

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[405] Lynne Sladky, "Official: Detainee Treatment Lawful," *Associated Press Online*, February 2, 2002, International News section. LexisNexis.

[406] Naomi Koppel, "Detainees Put Rules of War to Test," *Associated Press Online*, Feburary 4, 2002, International News section. LexisNexis.

[407] Rajiv Chandrasekaran and Peter Finn, "U.S. Behind Secret Transfer of Terror Suspects," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2002, A section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[408] Gregory Hooks and Clayton Mosher, "Outrages Against Personal Dignity: Rationalizing Abuse and Torture in the War on Terror," *Social Forces* 83 (2005). EBSCOhost (507803876).

[409] Seymour M. Hersh, "Annals of National Security: Torture at Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker*, May 10, 2004, accessed October 13, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/05/10/040510fa_fact. It could also be argued that the Abu Ghraib story "broke" when *Sixty Minutes II* ran the story on April 28, 2004, over a week before Hersh's article was published (though the story was released by *The New Yorker* online on April 30). Ultimately, I conclude that Hersh's article is the more significant event because, although a story regarding torture of prisoners is shocking, it was the pictures that generated the firestorm of controversy. Only Hersh's article provided context for the photographs, including that they were taken with personal cameras by the soldiers themselves. The photographs broadcast on *Sixty Minutes II* were shown only as evidence of torture and without context. I believe that Hersh's article alone illustrated the torture as the spectacle of violence that it truly was and that is why I use its release to mark the traumatic fracture of the Nine-Eleven narrative.

world were shocked by the photos from Abu Ghraib. They remind us that torture is not abstract."[410] And the photographs also reinforced the fear that the "Mission Accomplished" claim was premature.[411]

If the outrage published in U.S. newspapers and reported in televised news reports are any measure, the Abu Ghraib photographs marked a traumatic break in the Nine-Eleven narrative.[412] For this reason, *reactions to* the photographs are a compelling artifact to examine in relation to the thematic patterns of the Nine-Eleven narrative. For Brian Johsrud, the "*cultural reception* of the photographs, their appropriation and transmission, weave an accompanying tale of compulsively repeated re-naming, categorization, ordering and a manipulation of time and plot in and around torture."[413] The question to be answered, for those traumatized by them, is what do the pictures *mean*? As Lance Bennett, Regina Lawrence, and Steven Livingston explain, "the photos may have become icons for the world, but inside the United States, their *meaning* became the object of a political framing contest."[414] As Katherine Henninger noted, the photographs "have jumped their intended bounds, anchored and re-anchored by different texts and contexts."[415] Although representations of events by the media, the government,

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[410] Senate Judiciary Committee, "The Nomination of the Honorable Alberto R. Gonzales," Testimony by Douglas Johnson, *CQ Congressional Testimony*, January 6, 2005. LexisNexis.

[411] For example, Raymond Whitaker noted that the Abu Ghraib photographs served as a stark reminder that the War on Terror was one in which it was nearly impossible to declare "victory." There is no government to overthrow or army to defeat – as such, it is possible to conceive of it as a never ending war, meaning the Nine-Eleven narrative (as told) can never be completed. See Raymond Whitaker, "Theatre: The Truth About Camp X-Ray " *The Independent*, May 30, 2004, Features section, First edition. LexisNexis.

[412] Many reports used the term "firestorm" when detailing the fallout from the publication of the Abu Ghraib photographs. For example, see George Edmonson, "U.S. Commanders Said They Did Not Know of Prison Abuse Until January," *Cox News Service*, May 19, 2004, General News section. LexisNexis.

[413] Brian Johnsrud, "Putting the Pieces Together Again: Digital Photography and the Compulsion to Order Violence at Abu Ghraib," *Visual Studies* 26 (2011): 154. EBSCOhost (61157212). *Emphasis added*.

[414] Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, "None Dare Call It Torture," 467. *Emphasis added*.

[415] Katherine Henninger, "Atrocity or Nation-building? The Difference is in the Eye of the Beholder," *Mississippi Quarterly* 62 (2008): 239. EBSCOhost (40513125).

popular culture, etc. are always important in how we come to understand our world, they are particularly salient when most of us are refused direct access. As Matt Carlson notes, "Certainly, the Abu Ghraib scandal, doubly removed by its geography and tight military control, necessitated a reliance on journalistic accounts to provide details into what occurred at the prison and who was involved independent of the U.S. military."[416] In this section, I examine the administration's response and the MNO coverage through the descriptive, attributive, and affective frames in an effort to see if patterns emerge between the Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib narratives.[417]

Abu Ghraib: The descriptive frame

Although the function of the descriptive frame is to provide accurate information to the audience, the Abu Ghraib scandal adds a complicating wrinkle to the notion of "accuracy." For some, the events at Abu Ghraib, while regrettable, were not an example of torture but abuse by an isolated handful of soldiers. For others, not only were the prisoners at Abu Ghraib tortured, but the torture was approved by the highest levels of the Bush administration. The debate about what really happened inside Abu Ghraib began to play itself out through the descriptive frame.[418]

From the very beginning of the scandal, the administration was steadfast in its position that the United States does not engage in torture. Referencing Abu Ghraib

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[416] Matt Carlson, "Media Criticism as Competitive Discourse: Defining Reportage of the Abu Ghraib Scandal," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 33 (2009): 259. EBSCOhost.

[417] My outline of the three frames of the Abu Ghraib debate is taken from a close reading of approximately 100 articles.

[418] In addition to the newspaper and magazine articles I examined to establish the Abu Ghraib narrative, I also used Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris' book, *Standard Operating Procedure*, as foundational research. See Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008). Further, several scholars have come to similar conclusions as this project does in relation to the Abu Ghraib narrative in relation to Nine-Eleven. For example, Johnsrud noted "the narrative of everyday Americans' traumatic experience often paralleled to the national trauma of 9/11." Johnsrud, "Putting the Pieces Together," 162.

directly, President Bush said, "I share a deep disgust that those prisoners were treated the way they were treated. Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people. That's not the way we do things in America."[419] Although his comments were brief, they are illustrative of how the administration was to frame the issue – the United States does not torture.[420] What about this picture of a hooded prisoner standing on a box with wires attached to him? The United States does not torture. And this photo of uniformed United States soldiers grinning over a pile of naked prisoners? The United States does not torture. Stress positions? The United States does not torture. Waterboarding? The United States does not torture. These questions are not intended to be flippant regarding torture, but to illustrate the descriptive frame of the administration. For the administration, there can be several explanations for the events depicted in the Abu Ghraib photographs, but torture was not one of them because the United States does not engage in torture. As David Levi Strauss explained, "Bush and Rumsfeld refuse to call what happened at Abu Ghraib torture, because torture is what other states do, not the U.S. If we're doing it, it must not be torture."[421]

The administration had two primary defenses against charges of torture at Abu Ghraib: the definitional defense and the bad apple defense. The definitional defense contends that what happened at Abu Ghraib did not constitute torture. In a move similar to Rumsfeld's labeling prisoners as "enemy combatants" (in what many believe was an effort to side-step the Geneva Convention), the Bush administration played loose with the

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[419] George W. Bush, "Liane Hansen's Interview with Seymour Hersh," *Weekend Edition*, National Public Radio (May 2, 2004).

[420] On June 26, 2003, Defense Department general counsel William J. Haynes II sent a memo to Congress to clarify the administration's position regarding prisoner interrogation. In it, he assured Congress that the official policy is that the United States does not and would not engage in torture. See Bradley Graham and Thomas E. Ricks, "U.S. Sent Specialists to Train Prison Units," *The Washington Post*, May 4, 2004, A section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[421] David Levi Strauss, "Breakdown in the Gray Room: Recent Turns in the Image War," in *Abu Ghraib: The Politics of Torture*, ed. Kahlil Bendib (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 97.

definition of "torture," often referring to the events as "mistreatment." As Philip Gourevitch noted in his *New York Times* opinion piece, when the torture "was revealed they denied it. 'We do not torture,' Mr. Bush kept saying, even as a stream of official documents leaked to the press contradicted him."[422] The bad apple defense, on the other hand, argued that whatever happened at Abu Ghraib, it was the responsibility of the soldiers who perpetuated it and should not reflect on the United States military or the continuing war in Iraq. Bush assured the nation that there were only a handful of "bad apples," calling the troops in Iraq "the finest of the fine" representing "the best qualities of America."[423] Not only did members of the administration "all [get] behind the same message – that the abuse was the work of a few bad apples," but this was the party line throughout most of the government.[424] For example, during a CNN interview, Representative Duncan Hunter said, "I would hate to see this focus on six bad apples end up taking the real spotlight away from the men and women, the 135,000 heroes who are serving our country right now."[425] Together, the administration's defense boiled down to a claim that what occurred at Abu Ghraib was not torture, and even if it was, it was the fault of a few bad apples alone.

In their coverage of Abu Ghraib, the MNOs followed a pattern similar to the administration. Looking at how the news coverage defined the torture at Abu Ghraib,

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[422] Philip Gourevitch, "The Abu Ghraib We Cannot See," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2009, Editorial section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[423] Marsha Mercer, "Abuse Images are Branded on a Nation's Minds, Hearts," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, May 9, 2004, Area/State section, City edition. LexisNexis.
[424] "Bush Orders Probe into Iraqi Prisoner Abuse," *Channel News Asia*, May 4, 2004, World section. LexisNexis.
[425] Duncan Hunter, "President Bush Gives Interview on Military Scandal," *International News*, CNN (May 5, 2004). LexisNexis. Although Hunter is a Republican, Democrats, for the most part, failed to push back against either of the administration's defenses. For many, "there is no doubt that the Democrats have been failures as an opposition party, too frequently toning down protests out of fear of being labeled unpatriotic or soft on terrorism." Ron Chusid, "Frank Rich on the 'Good Germans' Among Us," *Liberal Values*, October 14, 2007. LexisNexis.

Timothy M. Jones and Penelope Sheets found that American journalists were much less critical of the event and "overwhelmingly avoided *torture* to describe Abu Ghraib, emphasizing instead more ambiguous, and arguably more innocuous, terms such as *abuse* or *mistreatment*."[426] Rather than behaving as a check against an over-reaching government, MNO coverage assisted in packaging the administration's definitional defense to the American public, acting "more as 'guard dogs' of the foreign policy establishment than its watchdogs."[427] Looking at the bad apple defense, Lila Rajiva, in her book *Language of Empire*, argued that the domestic news coverage overwhelming used the administration's phrase "bad apples."[428] Regardless of "the photos and available evidence suggesting a possible policy of torture laid bare at Abu Ghraib, the story quickly became framed as regrettable abuse on the part of a few troops."[429] An example of this framing by the domestic MNOs is an editorial by Harold W. Andersen in the Omaha World Herald; he writes, "There is dramatic evidence, of course, that a relatively few American soldiers went far beyond the bounds of decency and humane behavior in their treatment of some Iraqi prisoners in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad."[430] In this editorial, Andersen is clear that he opposes what happened at Abu Ghraib, but is

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[426] Timothy M. Jones and Penelope Sheets, "Torture in the Eye of the Beholder: Social Identity, News Coverage, and Abu Ghraib," *Political Communication* 26 (2009): 278. EBSCOhost (43578200). *Emphasis in original*.

[427] Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, "None Dare Call It Torture," 469. Further, Scott L. Althaus wonders if the media is even capable of checking the government as "one can hardly conceive of a functional press system in which news coverage does not closely shadow the activities of governments." Scott L. Althaus, "When News Norms Collide, Follow the Lead: New Evidence for Press Independence," *Political Communication* 20 (2003): 381. EBSCOhost (507853968). Althaus concludes that 30 years of political communication research suggests that the media is an ineffective watchdog against government excesses of power.

[428] Lila Rajiva, *The Language of Empire: Abu Ghraib and the American Media* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005). For an example of its use by administration defenders see Don Jenkins, "Baird Says Prisoner Abuse Photos Cause 'Revulsion,' 'Sadness'," *The Columbian*, May 14, 2004, World/Nation section. LexisNexis.

[429] Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, "None Dare Call It Torture," 481.

[430] Harold W. Andersen, "'Media Bonfire' Affects Pictures of Iraq Abuse, Saddam's Regime," *Omaha World Herald*, May 20, 2004, Editorial section. Lexis/Nexis.

careful not only to avoid use of the word "torture," but also to frame "a relatively few American soldiers" as those responsible.

One explanation as to why many of the MNOs framed Abu Ghraib as they did is linked not to an insidious agenda, but, rather, to the inherent foundations of our national subjectivity. Jones and Sheets contend that the commitment to cultural master narratives, which concretize national identity, almost always dictates the way international stories such as Abu Ghraib are covered. Even if the journalists covering the scandal weren't compelled to protect the American identity, they would be keenly aware that their audience was so compelled, and this demands "stories that are culturally resonant because it is good for business."[431] They conclude that, "there was a strong tendency for U.S. journalists to define what happened [at Abu Ghraib] in national identity-serving ways … thereby protecting – though likely without overt intentionality – a positive self-image."[432] And many Americans were all too willing to consume the narrative being served to them. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo, who conducted the famous Stanford Prison Experiment in the early 1970s, understands the temptation to accept the media's framing of Abu Ghraib. "Looking at the pictures of U.S. servicemen and women subjecting naked Iraqi detainees to dehumanizing acts," he writes, "it was easy and comforting for Americans to believe that depraved individuals were indeed to blame."[433]

Although a large portion of the MNO coverage mimicked the administration's explanation of what happened at Abu Ghraib, there was a portion of the coverage that insisted that Abu Ghraib was, indeed, a scandal. According to Mark Danner, "the highest officials of the American government personally approved torture, among them the

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[431] Jones and Sheets, "Eye of the Beholder," 279.
[432] Jones and Sheets, "Eye of the Beholder," 288-289.
[433] Philip Zimbardo, "A Few Good Apples," Foreign Policy, May 8, 2007, accessed May 17, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2007/05/07/a_few_good_apples, par. 2.

former president, vice-president, and the secretary of defense."[434] For Richard Cohen, the torture at Abu Ghraib was "pervasive and public," where the "makeshift rules of the camp" encouraged cruelty, pain and torture, which "will forever stain George Bush and his top aides. For them, the photos from Abu Ghraib are not pictures. They're mirrors."[435] Even for General Anthony Taguba, whose original report indicated no connection between the torture and the administration, the mounting evidence over the past three years leaves no doubt "the [Bush] administration has committed war crimes. They only question that remains to be answered is whether those who ordered the use of torture will be held to account."[436] For the reports that were critical of the administration for Abu Ghraib, not only were those responsible for the torture never called before The Hague, "many have even been promoted."[437] A short list of such promotions include: Jay Bybee, who argued torture had to be the equivalent to "organ failure," was appointed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; Michael Chertoff, who advised the C.I.A. that "coercive interrogation" was legally permissible, was chosen as the secretary of homeland security; William J. Haynes II, who oversaw the Pentagon studies on detainee interrogation, was twice nominated to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals; and Alberto Gonzales, White House legal counsel who referred to the Geneva Convention as "quaint" and "obsolete," was confirmed as U.S. Attorney General.[438]

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[434] Mark Danner, "Torture," *New York Magazine*, September 5, 2011. LexisNexis.
[435] Richard Cohen, "The Ultimate Casualty," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2008, Editorial section, Met 2 edition. LexisNexis.
[436] Anthony Taguba, "Administration's Cynicism on Torture Breathtaking," quoted in Jay Bookman, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 2008, At Issue section, Main edition. LexisNexis.
[437] "One Year After the Abu Ghraib Torture Photos: U.S. Government Response 'Grossly Inadequate,' Rights Group Says," *U.S. Newswire*, April 27, 2005, National Desk section. LexisNexis.
[438] Michiko Kakutani, "Following a Paper Trail to the Roots of Torture," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2005, Arts/Culture section. LexisNexis.

In the descriptive frame of the Abu Ghraib narrative, the focus centered on if the abuse constituted torture and who was responsible for it. For the administration and a large portion of the MNO coverage, the events at Abu Ghraib may have been examples of prisoner mistreatment, but were certainly not torture. Further, the mistreatment was not indicative of the United States military or its leaders, but was the failing of a handful of "bad apple" soldiers. There was, however, a section of the MNO coverage insisting not only was Abu Ghraib representative of torture, but that the blame could be laid directly at the feet of the Bush administration. With this blame in mind, let us turn our attention now to how such a denunciation could be projected long-term.

Abu Ghraib: The attributive frame

In the Nine-Eleven attributive frame, I noted that the two themes that emerged in the telling of the Nine-Eleven narrative were the move to action and the missing body. These themes look very different when examining the Abu Ghraib narrative. Looking first at the move to action theme, there is a pronounced difference in how "action" is conceived depending on the descriptive frame one adopted. For the administration and the MNOs who adopted the administration's explanation of Abu Ghraib, action seemed to be understood in relation to security and winning the War on Terror. In the White House report that accompanied the results from an internal investigation regarding torture, administration officials stated, "the United States is facing a new kind of war with an enemy that does not respect or operate under the rules of the Geneva Convention … [and] the White House and other agencies are wrestling with 'how best to address that foe.'"[439] From this, a person could believe that if the war was traditional or if the enemy fought fair, the mission would, indeed, be accomplished. That world, however, was gone

[439] Scott Lindlaw, "White House Plans to Release Large File of Documents on Deliberations Leading to Interrogation Tactics," *The Associated Press*, June 22, 2004, Washington Dateline section. LexisNexis.

forever and the practical necessity of security was more important than outmoded concepts like prisoner treatment. Sands quoted Pentagon attorney Haynes as saying, "Military necessity can sometimes allow … warfare to be conducted in ways that might infringe on otherwise applicable articles of the [Geneva] Convention."[440] For the administration, this move to action was now permissible in its task of protecting the citizenry. As Anthony Lewis summarized, "The premise of the Bush administration after September 11, 2001, was that the end, fighting terrorism, justified whatever means were chosen [and it] sought repeatedly to eliminate legal constraints on the means it adopted."[441]

In the MNO representations of the move to action, a common thread that emerged was a shift in the agency of torture. It was not the soldiers at Abu Ghraib who engaged in torture, they argued, but the terrorists who carried out the Nine-Eleven attacks. In an opinion piece published by *The Sun*, Jon Gaunt argued,

> If the liberals want to talk about the horrors of torture they should listen to the phone messages of the passengers on the planes as the careered into the World Trade Center, or remember the pictures of people who chose to jump rather than be burned alive. *That* was torture.[442]

Gaunt encourages us to eavesdrop on the last moments of the passengers on the hijacked planes and to watch the people jump from the Twin Towers so that we may understand "real" torture. In a letter to the editor, Sheila Darby asked, "Why are we worried about the alleged torture of terrorists? … How can anyone compare … techniques that do little or no lasting harm … to the terror and extreme physical devastation and death dealt to the

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[440] Philippe Sands, "The Green Light," *Vanity Fair* (2008): 282. EBSCOhost (504460573).
[441] Anthony Lewis, "Introduction," in *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*, eds. Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiv.
[442] Jon Gaunt, "All I am Saying, is Give War a Chance," *The Sun*, February 15, 2008, Opinion section. Lexis/Nexis. *Emphasis added*.

victims of 9/11?"[443] Further, in many MNO reports, there was often a separation between the actions at Abu Ghraib and "real torture." For Aryeh Spero, there was a difference between the "insensitivity to terrorists" and "the actual torture of our soldiers."[444] Lisa Fabrizio argued that absent U.S. action in places like Abu Ghraib, terrorists "who would gladly demonstrate what real torture is all about" could be unleashed on innocent Americans.[445] Vietnam veteran Harry Paddon argued that U.S. military personnel in Hanoi "suffered real torture, so do not talk to me about these nontorture techniques that were used against the terrorists after 9/11."[446] And according to Emmett Tyrrell, skateboarding is "infinitely more dangerous" than waterboarding because skateboarding can "caus[e] sprained ankles and broken bones."[447]

Not all of the MNO reports, however, dismissed the question of torture. For those that offered Abu Ghraib as an example of torture, the move to action often implicated the administration. Wesley Wark noted that there is "one hard fact about the torture tales: They will leave a permanent mark on the reputation of the United States and on its conduct of the war on terror. Neither the passage of time, nor the trial of low-level military policemen [sic] will wash off that blood."[448] According to Douglas Johnson, the Executive Director of the Center of Victims of Torture, the decisions by the Bush administration illustrated that "torture in the modern world is not, primarily, a tool for

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[443] Sheila Darby, "The Real Torture is by Terrorists," *The Roanoke Times*, April 25, 2009, Editorial section, Metro edition. Lexis/Nexis.
[444] Aryeh Spero, "The America-Haters Among Us," *Human Events Online*, November 23, 2006, In the News section. Lexis/Nexis.
[445] Lisa Fabrizio, "No Country for Old Glory," *The American Spectator*, February 27, 2008. Lexis/Nexis.
[446] Harry Paddon, "Your Letters," *Dayton Daily News*, May 6, 2009, Opinion section. Lexis/Nexis.
[447] Emmett Tyrrell, "The Guantanamo 14," *Human Events Online*, September 21, 2006, First Look section. Lexis/Nexis.
[448] Wesley Wark, "Abu Ghraib: Much Worse Than a Few 'Bad Apples'," *The Globe and Mail*, March 12, 2005, Book Review section. LexisNexis.

gaining information, but rather a political weapon, that uses fear to shape societies."[449]

Some of these MNO reports, however, extended the complicity beyond the administration and implicated the American public as well. As Marcella David noted, "we Americans don't get to make ourselves feel better by refusing to call what happened at Abu Ghraib torture or by characterizing it as 'torture lite.'"[450] Although the decisions to torture were not made by the average American, s/he was the one to pay the price for the inhumanity. According to Karen J. Greenberg, the decisions made by the administration exacted a toll from the nation's moral soul that was too high. She wrote,

> The use of coercive interrogation techniques was downplayed, not only by the military, but by the American press as well. The American public insisted in the early stages of the exposure of the memos and reports … that the practice could not possibly be systematic, reasoned, or intended. The general consensus was that Americans could not possibly be involved in such tactics. Which brings into focus yet another aspect of the decision to use torture; namely, what will be the spiritual cost, the overall damage to the character of the nation?[451]

Many of these reports personalized the torture and argued that the American population was culpable in the torture at Abu Ghraib. [452] For example, the American Medical

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[449] "The Nomination of the Honorable Alberto R. Gonzales."

[450] Marcella David, "America Can't Treat Abu Ghraib as Torture Lite," *The International Herald Tribune*, May 24, 2004, Opinion section. LexisNexis.

[451] Karen J. Greenberg, "From Fear to Torture," in *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*, eds. Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xvii.

[452] It may be tempting to dismiss the assumption that these reports might make one feel complicit in the torture at Abu Ghraib and even more tempting to remember the years immediately following September 11, 2001 differently. There is, however, ample evidence that Americans could carry with them a guilt surrounding the War on Terror. Although support for the war in Iraq plummeted in the last years of the Bush presidency, it is important to remember that support for vengeance and a desire to feel secure was dominant in the American psyche following the attacks. In fact, prior to the United States invasion of Iraq, a mere 11% of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein did not have (or was close to having) nuclear weapons and only 21% knew that Iraq did not assist with the Nine-Eleven attacks. The American public also supported military action against Iraq by a substantial majority. See "Americans Thinking About Iraq, but Focused on the Economy," *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, October 10, 2002. After Bush's State of the Union address in January of 2003 and Colin Powell's United Nations speech on February 5, 2003, opposition to a military invasion of Iraq had dropped to less than 25%. After the invasion itself, nearly 80% of Americans felt it was justified. See "Iraq," Gallup, 2012, accessed May 27, 2012, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1633/Iraq.aspx. Also see Robert Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11," *Political Communication* 20 (2003).

Association, expressing a group obligation for individual actions, publicly acknowledged and condemned the participation of medical personnel in the torture.[453] In a letter to President Barack Obama, AMA President Nancy H. Nielsen and Chair of the Board of Trustees Joseph M. Heyman, wrote, "Any involvement by physicians in torture is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as a healer. Such involvement would violate core ethical obligations of the medical profession to 'first, do no harm' and to respect human dignity and rights."[454] For the AMA, torture by any member threatens the ethical standing of the entire profession. And for some Americans, the social trauma of Abu Ghraib was accentuated by a feeling of personal complicity. As Melanie Reid wrote in an editorial,

> the abuse itself, human upon human, is a betrayal of a code of decency which the vast majority of us try to uphold every day. And yet - it bears repeating - they are doing this in our name. Your name. My name. There is no easy way to exculpate ourselves. We cannot dismiss the perpetrators as some kind of aberrant bits of trailer-trash: bad apples who must not be allowed to rot the reputation of the west. There is overwhelming evidence that the torture of Iraqi prisoners is and was systematic; it was condoned from the very top. No, the most unpalatable thing about the abuse in Abu Ghraib is that, in a way, we are all shamed, all blamed. However good, compassionate and honourable we think we are, we are colluders, non-participatory participants, interested bystanders. … We let this happen.[455]

In these MNO reports, mere agreement that torture at Abu Ghraib was insufficient; there was an additional individual culpability to the action done in the name of the American pubic.

The second theme that emerged in the attributive frame of the Nine-Eleven narrative was the missing body. Again, this theme is deployed differently depending on

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[453] "Legal Profession Still Lags in Response to Torture Advisers," *The Platform*, June 8, 2010. LexisNexis.
[454] Nancy H. Nielsen and Joseph M. Heyman, "Letter to President Barack Obama," April 17, 2009, accessed June 5, 2012, http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/-1/obama-letter-torture.pdf, par. 2.
[455] Melanie Reid, "We're All Shamed by the Darkness of Abu Ghraib," *The Herald*, May 25, 2004, 16. LexisNexis.

the position one took on the accuracy of torture claims from Abu Ghraib. For those who sought to dismiss torture at Abu Ghraib, the missing body theme appears as it relates to U.S. personnel deployed in Iraq. An example of the missing body in this context can be found in the rhetoric surrounding the April 9, 2004 attack on a coalition convoy that led to more than 30 personnel being labeled as "missing," including Private First Class Keith Maupin.[456] Maupin's story was reported in multiple MNO stories, including touching personal interest stories like the candlelight vigil that was held at his former high school in Cincinnati.[457] The official press release from the U.S. Army assured the American public that "the Soldiers [in Iraq] continue to look for their brothers-in-arms" quoting Master Sergeant Paul David Adkins as stating that, "the missing Soldiers remain our first priority."[458] The administration used the specter of the missing soldier to justify an increasingly unpopular military campaign and Nicholas Berg, in particular, became a touchstone for this theme in many MNO stories.[459] Less than two weeks after the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, a videotape was released that showed masked militants beheading Berg in retaliation. As Terence Hunt reported,

> After days of issuing apologies, President Bush shifted from defense to offense with a tough condemnation of terrorists. Splashed across front pages, the ghastly pictures just before the decapitation of Nicholas Berg provided ammunition for those who think the world's outrage over prisoner abuse has been overblown or misdirected.[460]

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[456] Lolita C. Baldor, "Missing Soldier's Family Gets Update," *Associated Press Online*, November 5, 2005, Washington Dateline section. LexisNexis.
[457] Sewell Chan and Pamela Constable, "Captured U.S. Soldier Shown on Arab Television Broadcast," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2004, Final edition. Lexis/Nexis.
[458] Chris McCann, "Soldiers Not Losing Hope for Missing Comrades," *Defense Department Documents and Publications*, September 18, 2007, U.S. Army Releases section. LexisNexis.
[459] "Bush Pledge as 30 More Hostages are Held in Iraq," *Mail on Sunday*, April 11, 2004. Lexis/Nexis.
[460] Terence Hunt, "Killing of American Berg Changed the Subject - But For How Long?," *The Associated Press*, May 12, 2004, State and Regional section, BC edition. Lexis/Nexis.

For some, the missing body theme, as encapsulated by Berg and Maupin's stories, became a rallying call to circle the wagons in support of the war effort. An editorial in the *Telegram & Gazette* argued that, "three civilians remain missing and now it is feared they will suffer the same fate as Mr. Berg. … Certainly, we are in mourning, but we also must steel our resolve to win the war against terrorism and to not defame Mr. Berg's terrible and inexcusable death by using it as an argument to retreat from our mission in Iraq."[461]

Through this attributive frame, even inspirational missing body stories were used to justify the war. For example, Halliburton truck driver Thomas Hamill was among the missing from the April attack, and, after being held captive for three weeks, Hamill pried open the doors to his prison and ran a half-mile to a passing military convoy. Much like the thrilling stories of survivors found among the rubble of the World Trade Center, the story of Hamill's "daring escape" was covered by hundreds of domestic magazines and newspapers.[462] In a statement on their web site, Halliburton stated, "Tommy is a courageous hero and we are proud of his resolve, resilience and refusal to give up hope."[463] Hamill was flown to Germany suffering from an infected gunshot wound. The chief U.S. military spokesperson in Iraq, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt reported that Hamill "has spoken to his family [and] is now ready to get back to work."[464] In this version of the attributive frame, the missing body is a warning against the inhumanity of the enemy and the heroism of the war effort.

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461 "No Retreat," *Telegram & Gazette*, May 13, 2004, Editorial section. Lexis/Nexis.
462 Lee Keath, "American Hostage Escapes Captors," *The Associated Press*, May 2, 2004, International News section, BC edition. Lexis/Nexis.
463 "US Hostage Safe After Escape," *Austin American-Statesman*, May 3, 2004, News section. Lexis/Nexis.
464 "US Hostage Hamill Escapes in Iraq," *Frontier Star*, May 2, 2004. Lexis/Nexis.

Another way the missing body theme manifests itself in the Abu Ghraib narrative is through the metaphor of haunting, and, insofar as the attributive frame attempts to give meaning to an event, the use of haunting and ghosts as a metaphor is conspicuous. Looking first at the MNO reports, Jonathan Manthorpe writes that, "the United States is now haunted … by the controversial images of abuse at Iraq's Abu Ghraib detention centre."[465] For David Matlin, not only do the pictures haunt us, but they give presence to something more ephemeral. He remarks that "the images from Abu Ghraib [are] the unsayable whispers of our own invention heaving with wanton violation. … Make no mistake; these are ugly, dangerous facts about who we may be and who we think we are."[466] This notion of an absence being made present is an integral part of the haunting mythos. According to Avery Gordon, "A structure of feeling 'articulates *presence*' as the tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences. Such a tangle – as object and experience – is haunting."[467] In the context of trauma, the emergence of a presence that marks an absence is the return of the repressed, a cycle of experience that demands attention and signification. For Gordon, "haunting is the most general instance of the clamoring return of the reduced to a delicate social experience struggling, even unaware, with its shadowy but exigent presence."[468] This theme of haunting is not necessarily surprising as many scholars in trauma studies have noted an almost necessary relation between haunting and trauma. In fact, the fear of a traumatic event haunting the subject is one that Caruth highlights in her work: "This singular *possession by the past* …

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[465] Jonathan Manthorpe, "America's Self-Inlficted 9/11 Legacy," *The Vancouver Sun*, September 11, 2010, Weekend Review section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[466] David Matlin, "Abu Ghraib: The Surround," in *Abu Ghraib: The Politics of Torture*, ed. Kahlil Bendib (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 63-64.
[467] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 200. *Emphasis in originial*.
[468] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 201.

extends beyond the bounds of a marginal pathology and has become a central characteristic of the survivor experience of our time."[469]

The haunting aspects of Abu Ghraib was not isolated in how the social body experienced the trauma of Abu Ghraib, but also in the response of the haunted subject. Gordon notes that the haunted subject is always-already bound with the haunting and "if you don't banish it, or kill it, or reduce it to something you can already manage, when it appears to you, the ghost will inaugurate the necessity of doing something about it."[470] The theme of haunting appears rarely in the government's discourse, but when it does, it often manifests itself as a call for exorcism.[471] Senator Charles Schumer was one of the few government officials who publically expressed his haunted feelings regarding Abu Ghraib and hoped to find redemption through the blame and banishment of those most responsible. In an interview with Jim Lehrer, Schumer said, "the best way to deal with [Abu Ghraib] is come clean and come clean quickly. Find out how often it happened, where it happened, how high up the chain of command it went and exorcise it, get rid of it."[472] These exorcisms, however, do not require a priest or a vial of holy water – they can take the form of very practical attempts to banish traumatic reminders. For example, immediately following the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs, "a bipartisan group of senators [urged] the Pentagon to demolish the Abu Ghraib prison to exorcise what has

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[469] Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 151. *Emphasis in original*. For other examples of the haunting theme in trauma studies, see Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

[470] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 205-206. *Emphasis in original*.

[471] It is not surprising that there is the haunting theme is rare in the government's discourse, because the administration was so intent on dismissing or distracting from accusations of torture. As Etse Sikanku notes, however, government policy can "sometimes come back to haunt us;" to which we should then seek "to exorcise them after realizing the overpowering effects of their tentacles." Etse Sikanku, "America Nees to Re-Evaluate Its Policies," *Iowa State Daily*, July 5, 2007, Column section. LexisNexis.

[472] Charles Schumer, "Photo Fallout," *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, Public Broadcasting Service (May 5, 2004). LexisNexis.

become a symbol of … an embarrassing episode for the U.S. military."[473] In fact, Bush himself urged the Iraqi people to tear down the prison "to expunge the memory of Saddam's tortures – and, conveniently, of U.S. abusers."[474] Such moves recall the efforts at ground zero, weeks after the attacks, to recover missing bodies. All hope was lost in finding survivors, but efforts continued so that the remains could be "laid to rest" and the survivors could move past the event. Here, the exorcism of haunting memories similarly hope to lay the ghost to rest and re-claim America's moral standing in the world.

The American social body continues to be haunted not only by the events of Abu Ghraib – which most of us did not witness – but the images of those events.[475] When asked to choose the most important and enduring photograph of the new millennium, art critic Sean O'Hagan cited the picture of Gilligan (the hooded man standing wired on a box) as the one that "haunts the collective imagination like no other recent photograph. It is a snapshot of horror and abjection."[476] Walter Shapiro reveals that he "remains haunted" by even the most "seemingly banal pictures" from Abu Ghraib.[477] The final way in which the missing body theme emerges lies with the pictures themselves.[478] For

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[473] "Red Cross Says it Urged U.S. Action on Prison," *CNN*, May 6, 2004, World section, Internet edition. LexisNexis.

[474] Vivienne Walt, "Not Better Forgotten: Why Iraq Needs to Put the Past in Its Place," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 2004, Outlook section, Final edition. LexisNexis. Earlier in the article, Walt quotes Kanan Kamiya, founder of the Iraq Memory Foundation, as saying, "you can't exorcise the ghosts by dismissing them." It is also interesting that Walt described Hussein's men as "torturers," and U.S. soldiers only as "abusers."

[475] It is very possible that these pictures continue to haunt not only the American social body, but the global public as well. Elizabeth Withey noted that, "the images of naked men tied up in an Iraqi prison with panites over their faces haunted the world when they came to public attention in 2004." Elizabeth Withey, "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib Haunt Filmmaker," *Edmonton Journal*, November 4, 2007, Culture section. LexisNexis.

[476] Sean O'Hagan, "21st Century Classics," *The Observer*, November 20, 2011, Arts Review section. LexisNexis.

[477] Walter Shapiro, "Why We're Publishing the New Abu Ghraib Photos," *Salon*, February 16, 2006, Feature section. LexisNexis.

[478] The larger discussion of how the pictures may work in the rhetorical constitution of the American subject will be taken up in a future chapter. Here, I will limit my discussion to the discussion of the release of the pictures themselves.

some, the pictures themselves are "missing" in that they tell an incomplete story. As Gourevitch explains, the photographs "for all their power to reveal, can also serve as a distraction, even a deterrent from precise understanding of the events they depict. Photographs cannot show us a chain of command, or Washington decision-making. Photographs cannot tell stories."[479] He contends that the pictures themselves "became the cover-up" and ultimately served only to justify the administration's "bad apple" defense, concluding that, "the soldiers who revealed our corruption to us were made scapegoats and thrown in prison."[480] Further, some argued that the mere publication of the pictures was an exercise in anti-Americanism. After noting that the media decided not to show gruesome images from Nine-Eleven, Jonah Goldberg writes, "Such restraint is allegedly the norm in the US media. But, that norm goes out the window when there's an opportunity to make Americans look like barbarians. … [The media] should not have released the Abu Ghraib photos."[481]

For others, however, the importance of the pictures was not in their incomplete, or "missing," quality, but in the remains they "recovered." Like the recovered remains from the WTC rubble forced an engagement with the horror of the event, these pictures represented an honest engagement with the spectacle of torture for some. Ted Rall dismisses the notion that the Abu Ghraib photographs could serve as a distraction

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[479] Gourevitch, "We Cannot See," LexisNexis. In an interview with Anderson Cooper on CNN, Gourevitch also explained that he didn't believe that pictures mattered in relation to peoples' beliefs. Speaking about the killing of Osama Bin Laden, Gourevitch argued that people were going to believe what they wanted to, regardless of pictorial evidence, and claimed that even if the government had released pictures of Bin Laden's corpse, many would have claimed they were a forgery, just as they had done with President Barack Obama's birth certificate. See Philip Gourevitch, "New Details Revealed on Bin Laden Mission," *Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees*, CNN (May 3, 2011). LexisNexis. This claim is echoed in an article by Louis Masur, in which he claims "we believe first and see second." Louis P. Masur, "Blacks, Whites, and Grays," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 16, 2011, Opinion & Ideas section. LexisNexis.

[480] Gourevitch, "We Cannot See," LexisNexis.

[481] Jonah Goldberg, "Half the Story Taking Up All the Headlines," *The Times*, May 15, 2004, Features section. LexisNexis.

because it presupposes an attention to torture that isn't there. He argues that, "Americans need something. That's certain. Because they definitely do not know what is going on. … Americans don't see the brutality of their wars in the newspaper, on the nightly news, in their weekly newsmagazines, or at the movies."[482] For David Levi Strauss, photographic evidence of torture is important because "the notion of a 'clean' war, a war without carnage, is only saleable to a population that has been kept from seeing images" of horror.[483] The pictures from Abu Ghraib, however, were more than just pictorial evidence, but the form they came packaged in was important as well. These pictures were not the sleek, professional product of a trained photojournalist, but the imperfect snapshots of an amateur shutterbug. When seen in that light, these pictures "erup[t] from deep within the American public image unconscious. They seem not to have been taken by anyone, and at the same time, by all of us."[484] It is in their amateur nature that we feel the personal complicity.

The debate surrounding the value of photographic evidence surfaced again in 2009, when the Obama administration decided not to release new photographs from Abu Ghraib that had been uncovered. Gourevitch defended the administration's decision and argued that the new pictures wouldn't tell us anything new about what happened. Others disagreed, however, and argued that, "as long as the photos are being suppressed, the public will not know the full horror of the policies' consequences."[485] And, in a letter to the editor, Paul Sweeney said he was "insulted" by the assumption that others could decide what he did and did not "need to know. Publish and be damned," he concluded,

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[482] Ted Rall, "Censorship of War Casualties in the US," *The Nation*, July 29, 2011. LexisNexis.
[483] Strauss, "Breakdown in the Gray Room," 91.
[484] Strauss, "Breakdown in the Gray Room," 94.
[485] Amrit Singh, "The Value in Showing the Photos of Torture," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2009, Editorial section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

"and let people judge for themselves what is useful, what is worthwhile or necessary."[486] *Salon*'s Walter Shapiro, defending his decision to publish additional pictures from Abu Ghraib in 2006, argued that it is necessary to expand the public's photographic record so that we never forget. He writes,

> Abu Ghraib cannot be allowed to fade away like some half-forgotten domestic political controversy. … Grotesque violations of every value that America proclaims occurred within the walls of that prison. These abuses were carried out by soldiers who wore our flag on their uniforms and apparently believed that Americans here at home would approve of their conduct. Rather than hiding what they did out of shame, they commemorated their sadism with a visual record.[487]

For some, the danger wasn't that the photographs would spur a debate over their meaning, but that such a debate would never occur at all and the event itself would be erased from the public memory. The ghosts of these photographs continue to haunt the descriptive frame and exist as a standing contradiction to the master narrative of Nine-Eleven. It is attributive in the sense that it begins to provide meaning, not only to the torture at Abu Ghraib, but to the public and administrative reaction to Nine-Eleven as well. With these comments as a foundation, let's now turn our attention to the final frame – the affective frame.

Abu Ghraib: The affective frame

The affective frame shapes how these themes and narratives are understood in a larger, long-term, context. In the Nine-Eleven master narrative, the affective frame positioned the United States as the moral hero. The Abu Ghraib affective frame, the salient issue for the administration and most MNO coverage was not Abu Ghraib, but a memory of Nine-Eleven. In fact, when engaging the issue of Abu Ghraib, the

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[486] Paul Sweeney, "Letters to the Editor," *The International Herald Tribune*, May 29, 2009, Opinion section. LexisNexis.
[487] Shapiro, "New Abu Ghraib Photos," LexisNexis.

administration and many MNOs worked to consistently "invoke the memory of Nine-Eleven."[488] While never deviating from the position that the United States did not torture, administration officials made continual references to Nine-Eleven and reiterated time and again that the "world had changed."[489] During a June 2004 press conference, Alberto Gonzales, Bush's White House counsel and future attorney general, and Jim Haynes, Rumsfeld's counsel and Pentagon attorney, assured those gathered that the administration did not condone torture, but reminded everyone that we were playing by different rules. Remembering this press conference, Philippe Sands writes, "for two hours Gonzales and Haynes laid out the administration's narrative. Al-Qaeda was a different kind of enemy, deadly and shadowy. It targeted civilians and didn't follow the Geneva Conventions or any other international rules."[490] The implication was that the world had changed and the United States should not be hamstrung by outdated agreements. Administration spokesperson Scott McClellan, during a White House press briefing, offered the following: "The attacks of September 11th, just three and a half years ago, changed the world we live in. The president made a decision three and a half years

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[488] "Invoke the memory of Nine-Eleven" is the exact phrase used in literally every one of these reports on the rhetorical strategies deployed by the Bush administration when dealing with controversial issues. From the decision to expand domestic wiretapping, (Walter Brasch, "The Bush Magical Mystery Political Capital Tour," *The Democratic Daily*, September 17, 2006. Lexis/Nexis.), to the use of presidential privilege to keep information to itself (Don Gonyea, "From the Start, Bush White House Kept Secrets," *Weekend Edition*, National Public Radio (May 21, 2006).), to justifying the war in Iraq (Suzanne Malveaux, "Deadline for New Iraq Constitution Nears," *CNN Live Today*, Cable News Network (August 22, 2005).), to dealing with virtually any military issue (Susan Page, "It's Clearly a Campaign for Commander-in-Chief," *USA Today*, July 22, 2004, News section, Final edition. Lexis/Nexis.)

[489] For Agamben, leaders in power during times of national crisis can attempt to extend that very crisis in an effort to solidify their position. In times of national trauma, those in power may "switch to a *cultural narrative* that moves the public mind back toward the dominant cultural order." Hillel Nossek and Dan Berkowitz, "Telling 'Our' Story Through News of Terrorism," *Journalism Studies* 7 (2006): 691. EBSCOhost (22172528). *Emphasis in original*. The quote included is referencing journalists, but since the media is how virtually all messages are disseminated, it is equally representative of the behavior of multiple systems of power.

[490] Sands, "The Green Light."

ago to take the fight to the enemy, to prevent attacks before they reach our shores."[491] When asked directly about rendition and torture, McClellan clarified that the administration did not condone torture, but noted that,

> we're talking about the war on terrorism, and this is a different kind of war. What took place on September 11th changed the world that we live in; it changed the equation when it came to addressing the threats of the 21st century that we face. We have an obligation to the American people to gather intelligence that will help prevent attacks from happening in the first place.[492]

The MNO coverage of the government discourse kept in-line with the administration's official position, but what about the way the story was covered separate from administration press conferences?

The MNO coverage of Abu Ghraib similarly recalled the Nine-Eleven narrative. In her examination of Abu Ghraib media coverage, Rajiva found that domestic news reports often framed the scandal around Nine-Eleven stories, so that although the torture reports "seem[ed] to critique the official line, [they] actually reinforced it."[493] As an example, she provides a detailed account of three segments that appeared on *Face the Nation*, where the Abu Ghraib story (an interview with General Richard Myers, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) is sandwiched between a story about an American hostage who had escaped his captors and a 50-year retrospective on boxing legend Mohammed Ali. She writes,

> Bob Schieffer's interview of Myers was replete with examples of the PR strategy of repackaging, in which elements of a story are downplayed or highlighted to alter the appearance of the 'package' being sold. The story of Hamill [the American hostage], which led the show, set the tone, subtly transforming revulsion from the abuse to patriotic solidarity with the war effort, replacing ugly pictures of pain with warm ones of a family reunited, and allowing Iraqis to

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[491] Scott McClellan, "The White House Regular Briefing," *Federal News Service*, March 7, 2005. LexisNexis.
[492] McClellan, "Briefing," LexisNexis.
[493] Rajiva, *Language of Empire*, 22.

> subside into the faceless anonymity of the 'enemy' as viewers celebrated a fellow American's courage.[494]

This strategy is consistently applied, argues Rajiva, reframing the story by deflecting attention elsewhere, usually towards a memory of Nine-Eleven.

Invoking the memory of Nine-Eleven played itself out in the editorial and opinion pages of many MNOs as well. In the week following Hersh's article, newspapers around the country "published many readers' letters expressing anger at humanitarian do-gooders who [wouldn't] let the matter of Abu Ghraib die."[495] In a sampling of these letters to the editor, one person wrote in to *The Chicago Daily Herald* arguing,

> We have terrorists all over and if we can gain information that will help us in this war, it would be our duty to gain it in any way we can. The people at Gitmo must have been doing something suspicious to have been arrested in the first place. Do you really think they would not hesitate to use torture or abuse on us if they had the chance? It has been proved time and again. Did we forget 9/11 when people were used as human bombs and took down the Twin Towers in New York?[496]

A reader of *The Roanoke Times* wrote, "don't forget 9/11" because the attacks showed us that "the book" on how we treat "uncivilized enemies" needed "expansion, and I am glad that my government felt the same way."[497] And in a letter to *The Detroit News*, one reader wrote, "it's pathetic that the Democrats and the liberal media are attempting to make a political issue of the humiliation of a few Iraqi terrorists and potentially dangerous prisoners. Let's remember September 11 and the tortures and murders committed by the Islamic terrorists. … Patriotic Americans will support their country and

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[494] Rajiva, *Language of Empire*, 22.

[495] Zoe Heller, "How Quickly America Forgot Its Outrage," *The Daily Telegraph*, May 15, 2004, Features section. LexisNexis. The phrase "humanitarian do-gooders" is in reference to the testimony by Senator Inhofe where he declares to be "more outraged by the outrage" cited elsewhere.

[496] Laurel Anderson, "Gitmo Prisoners are Terrorists," *Chicago Daily Herald*, June 20, 2008, Fence Post section. Lexis/Nexis.

[497] Frank Peck, "An Uncivilized Enemy Demands New Methods," *The Roanoke Times*, May 21, 2009, Letters to the Editor section, Metro edition. Lexis/Nexis.

its president."[498] This last letter also illustrates that one of the key components of the debate is the question of national identity and what the role of the "patriotic American" should be.[499] Even a year and a half later, these themes continued. In a December 2005 letter to *The Daily Mail*, a reader asks, "Do the human rights activists not remember 9/11? The terrorists only agenda is to kill, maim and destroy. The CIA only want to ask some shadowy people a few questions – what's wrong with that?"[500]

MNOs that dared to question the government line were quickly lambasted as propaganda or nonobjective journalism. Carlson noted that, "critics on the right articulated their claims around a notion of journalistic objectivity while accusing journalists of displaying a prominent liberal bias. … This tack aimed at using objectivity against journalists to shift news coverage to a desired political position."[501] For example, Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe exclaimed he was "more outraged by the outrage" over what happened at Abu Ghraib than the torture itself, citing specifically his "outrag[e at] the press and the politicians and the political agendas that are being served by this."[502] The day following his remarks, Inhofe claimed, he received over 4,000 emails (up from

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[498] George A. Hardy, "Support the President," *The Detroit News*, June 2, 2004, Letters section. Lexis/Nexis.

[499] This debate over national identity and who gets to define the American subject has existed for as long as there has been an American subject to define. Phrases such as "America, Love It or Leave It," during the Vietnam War illustrate its enduring place in the rhetorical discussion. The Abu Ghraib scandal, however, seemed to bring the divisive nature of national identity to the fore and it hasn't really faded since. For example, four years later, during an October campaign speech, then Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin made enduring headlines with her reference to parts of the country being "real America." The implication, of course, was that other parts (presumably liberal strongholds) were "not real," or worse, "anti-" America.

[500] John Lander, "No," *The Daily Mail*, December 9, 2005, Letters section. Lexis/Nexis. It should be noted that *The Daily Mail* is a British newspaper and that the letter was in defense of letting "CIA torture planes" bring prisoners to England for interrogation. While this may not be an example of the negotiation over the American national identity, it does speak to the power of the "remember Nine-Eleven" message.

[501] Carlson, "Media Criticism as Competitive Discourse," 271.

[502] Senate Armed Services Committee, "Allegations of Mistreatment of Iraqi Prisoners," Testimony by 108th Cong., 2nd sess., *Federal News Service*, May 11, 2004.

the 100 per day he usually receives) supporting his position.[503] For some, the mere mention of Abu Ghraib was an unpatriotic act that dishonored those who died on September 11.[504] Instead of discussing what occurred inside the prison walls, the debate shifted to the politics of how the story was covered *and* allowed administration defenders to accuse its critics of dishonoring the memory of those who died on Nine-Eleven. In terms of reframing the issue away from Abu Ghraib and towards the Nine-Eleven narrative, the strategy of media blaming was very effective. Zoe Heller noted that the public outrage about Abu Ghraib was shorter lived than that against Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" in the 2004 Super Bowl, which had occurred just a few months earlier. Very quickly, outrage became synonymous with whining and the media encouraged those still focused on the torture to "quit belly-aching" and "move on."[505]

Although the government discourse and MNO coverage of Abu Ghraib tended to be dismissive and short-lived, there were still a great number of Americans who continued to be impacted by the memory of torture. The administration and MNOs assured the American public that the attacks occurred because the terrorists "hated our freedom" and the United States stood as the "brightest beacon for freedom and

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[503] Mark Leibovich, "The Scandal Scandal? Senator James Inhofe's Opposing View," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 2004, Style section, Final edition. LexisNexis. Referencing the emails, the article quotes Inhofe as saying, "One of the consistent strains was, it's about time someone said something."

[504] There seems to have been an attempt by some to paint any media outlet willing to cover the Abu Ghraib story as "anti-American." In a *Washington Times* opinion piece by Diana West, she asks, "Why have the media continued to report, obsess and revel in the same old humiliation photos from U.S.-controlled Abu Ghraib even as they ignore never-before-aired videotape that documents the hacking, maiming, bloody torture that took place at Abu Ghraib under Saddam Hussein?" Diana West, "Good Manners: No Way to Win the War on Terror," *The Washington Times*, June 18, 2004, OPED section, Final edition. LexisNexis. Further, a *St. Petersburg Times* letter to the editor provides evidence that this message coalesced with at least some of the public: "Has anyone besides me noticed how the mainstream media are giving their viewers 'accurate reporting?' Downplay the good, hammer the bad. Run the Abu Ghraib story on the front page for several days. Bury the Nick Berg story after one day. Ignore the sarin and mustard gas finds. If the story will help Bush, bury it. If it will hurt Bush, run it day after day." Becky Liddell, "We're Fighting a Winnable War," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 22, 2004, Editorial section. LexisNexis.

[505] Heller, "How Quickly America Forgot," LexisNexis. To be clear, Heller was not promoting the "move on" position, only reporting the general approach the U.S. media seemed to be taking.

opportunity in the world," but that stood in stark contrast to the photographs of uniformed soldiers standing in front of a pyramid of nearly naked prisoners.[506] At the end of the story, the "good guy" is supposed to win, but these revelations of torture forced the question, arguably for the first time, of how the "good guy" was supposed to act. In a letter to the editor of the *Dayton Daily News*, Randall K. Jewell wrote

> As a boy, I heard about the torture of American prisoners of war in World War II (fingernails pulled out, etc.). But I believed, and took pride in the fact, that American soldiers were good guys, different from the others. We'd never mistreat POWs or intentionally inflict pain, even on our enemies. Then came Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo; then stories of rendition, outsourcing the torture; then news about secret CIA prisons in Eastern Europe. What's happened to America? How could we leave the moral high ground?[507]

Abu Ghraib was traumatizing because it not only threatened the Nine-Eleven narrative, it ran contrary to its moral thematic. It was not just framing the United States as the "good guy," but the insistence that the enemy was "evil." In an opinion piece for *The Daily Iowan*, Beau Elliot wrote, "damn the practical aspects. No civilized society allows its soldiers to engage in such repulsive, beastly acts. This is the way we're introducing democracy to Iraqis? Under Saddam, Abu Ghraib was a notoriously brutal place. Under America, Abu Ghraib seems not a whole lot better."[508] For Beau and many others, there was no immediate explanation for the pictures they were confronted with, no value system to justify them, and no place to project their fears; they festered as pure abjection.

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[506] As outlined earlier, the Nine-Eleven narrative was told around a mythic moral structure that framed the United States as the moral "good guy" fighting against the "evil doers." This framing reinforces the rationale for the government discourse to consistently deny that torture occurred at Abu Ghraib, for if the administration were to "acknowledge that Americans torture their prisoners, [it] would contradict everything this administration has invited the public to believe about the virtue of American intentions and America's right, flowing from that virtue, to undertake unilateral action on the world stage." Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2004, Magazine section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[507] Randall K. Jewell, "Torture Does Enormous Harm," *Dayton Daily News*, December 28, 2005, Opinion section, A11. LexisNexis.

[508] Beau Elliot, "Torturing the Hearts and Minds," *The Daily Iowan*, May 4, 2004. LexisNexis.

Melvyn Leffler claimed that, "it is time for Americans to reflect more deeply about their history and values."[509]

In fact, nearly a year after the Abu Ghraib photographs were published, there was a feeling among some social commentators that the fear generated in the wake of Nine-Eleven had left too many Americans bereft of a moral compass.[510] In their minds, the tepid, apologetic, and relatively short media coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal, coupled with a backlash against an open discussion of torture, provided sufficient evidence that the American desire for security now permanently trumped ethical concerns. Rick Groen argued that,

> the store of moral outrage has diminished in the U.S., [where] Americans are disinclined to engage in any honest debate over national security – to consider that freedom may come with inherent risks and that to defend against those risks too aggressively, unethically, is to destroy the very thing you wish to preserve.[511]

For Mark Danner, the ubiquity of torture, both in policy and its favorable representations in popular culture, has not only numbed the American people to its use, but fundamentally changed the public discourse. He writes that, "Americans have lived with the reality of torture for many years now, and many say they support its use. … Torture, once anathema, has become a policy of choice."[512]

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[509] Melvyn P. Leffler, "9/11 in Retrospect," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (2011): 43. EBSCOhost (64464652).

[510] See the position of the International Red Cross in "Iraq: Call to Culpability," *The Hotline*, May 7, 2004, National Briefing section. LexisNexis.

[511] Rick Groen, "Outside the Frame, a Terrible Subject Comes Into Focus," *The Globe and Mail*, May 2, 2008, Film Review section. LexisNexis.

[512] Danner, "Torture," LexisNexis. As further evidence of Danner's claim, a May 2004 ABC poll (almost immediately following the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs) found that 35% of Americans believed that torture is an acceptable practice and 30% believed that the events at Abu Ghraib did not constitute torture. See "ABC Poll Finds Majority Rejects Torture, but Americans Split on 'Coercive' Questioning Techniques," *The Frontrunner*, May 27, 2004, National Pollwatch section. LexisNexis. The margin of error in the poll was listed as +/- 3%. As an interesting aside, the headline of the poll notes that most Americans don't support torture, but doesn't account for the tremendous shift in public opinion from a time when torture was universally reviled (by the public, at least) during the Vietnam era. Further, more recent polls show that torture is becoming even more acceptable; a poll commissioned by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 42% of Americans favor the use of torture on terrorists, which is a 6 point

Of course, not every American placed a primary value on security and there were still millions throughout the nation for whom the traumatic impact of government-sponsored torture lingered. In his letter to the editor, *Star Tribune* reader Patrick Mulligan emphasizes that Americans cannot ignore the torture and hope to "sweep Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay under the rug."[513] In fact, some argue that it this very desire to turn a blind eye toward the torture that prompted the horror from the start. Alan Dershowitz argued,

> Abu Ghraib occurred precisely because U.S. policy consisted of rampant hypocrisy: our President and Secretary of Defence [sic] publicly announced an absolute prohibition on all torture, and then with a wink and a nod sent a clear message to soldiers to do what you have to do to get information and to soften up suspects for interrogation.[514]

This suggests that, although the government's discourse and the vast majority of MNO coverage avoided the torture issue, there were many Americans who wanted to engage the questions of torture that lingered in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib. This tension is one of the issues that will be taken up next chapter.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I described the Nine-Eleven master narrative as well as the complications to that narrative that erupted from the Abu Ghraib scandal. In order to provide a manageable limit to the sheer number of texts that feed into this narrative, I

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increase since 2008 and a 13 point increase since 2004. See Jonathan Turley, "Poll: Americans More Supportive of Torture - Though Still a Minority," September 20, 2010, accessed August 11, 2012, http://jonathanturley.org/2010/09/20/poll-americans-more-supportive-of-torture-though-still-a-minority/.

[513] Patrick Mulligan, "Reporting, Not Ridicule," *Star Tribune*, June 2, 2005, News section, Metro edition. LexisNexis.

[514] Alan Dershowitz, "When Torture is the Least Evil of Terrible Options," *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, June 11, 2004. LexisNexis. In should be noted that Dershowitz claims that he doesn't take a position on the use of torture, but his essay does suggest that he is in favor of non-lethal measures during interrogation. Regardless of his personal position, however, the argument that the lack of public discussion regarding torture does allow the government to establish its own rules in a vacuum is one I find compelling.

used a frame analysis to isolate the representations of these crises. These frames start first with the descriptive frame where a premium is placed on timely and accurate information. After that, it moves to the attributive frame where meaning is applied to the event. This meaning is projected long-term in the affective frame where the coverage works to solidify cultural norms in a master narrative. In context of Nine-Eleven, the master narrative became that the United States was a peaceful giant, awoken by an unprovoked attack. The people showed the inherent bravery and morality of the American Subject during, and immediately after, the attack through their move to action and their efforts to recover the missing body. Armed with the moral right on its side, the United States engaged in a justified military campaign to protect its citizens and exact revenge on those who had done harm to the American people.

The Nine-Eleven master narrative began to fray with the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs in 2004. This pictures depicted American soldiers engaged in torturous activities against prisoners being held in the War on Terror creating a counter-narrative that challenged the prevailing understanding of Nine-Eleven. This counter-narrative, manifested through the Abu Ghraib photographs coupled with an increasing feeling of war fatigue among the American people, called into question the moral positioning of the United States. There were three distinct reactions to the photographs, which created three positions from which one might rhetorically constitute the American Subject. For the administration and many of the MNOs, they denied that the photographs depicted torture, and even if they did, they were the product of a handful of bad apples. This defense was supplemented by a consistent invoking of the Nine-Eleven master narrative that justified any action in the name of security and/or revenge. There were some, however, who refused such an explanation and laid the responsibility of the torture directly at the feet of the Bush administration. And, for others, the true responsibility lie

with the American people and the culture of torture we had created. In the next chapter, I will see if these patterned responses appear in the popular culture representations of Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib.

Chapter 4

A Frame Genre Criticism of the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial Films

Film has a special and powerful relationship to the way American culture stories its history.[515] The United States public has often allowed filmmakers the luxury to bend and mutate events for the sake of telling a good story.[516] As Arthur G. Neal explains, in film, the "constraints surrounding events as they unfolded no longer apply. Plausibility to the reading and viewing audience is of more concern than historical accuracy … and the search for a collective identity becomes a never-ending quest. In the realm of mass entertainment, the past becomes a form of constructed memory."[517] Over the course of the next three chapters, I will examine three sets of films (what I term the Nine-Eleven films, the Testimonial films, and torture porn) in relation to the Nine-Eleven master

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[515] This point becomes quite clear when one reads a particular story that appeared in *The New York Times*. In October of 1989, police found the bodies of married couple Charles and Carol Stuart in their car. Charles was bloody and Carol (then pregnant) was dead, shot through the head. Charles claimed that a man had robbed them and shot his wife. In the following months, Charles had become the primary suspect in his wife's death and he committed suicide in January of 1990. *The New York Times* article about the crime and subsequent suicide interviewed a number of friends and family members who knew the couple and the family. Marilyn Sliwinski, a woman who lived across the street from Charles' parents and who had known him since he was a child, was interviewed and said, "I'm dying for the movie to come out so I can see how it ends." In this case, Sliwinski is intimately connected to the people involved in the event, but will still rely on a film to tell her the story of what happened. See Constance L. Hays, "Illusion and Tragedy Coexist After a Couple Dies," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1990, 1 section, Final edition. LexisNexis. As an important note of credit: this news story (and Sliwinsksi's response) seems to hold a special significance for Mark Slouka as well, who uses it to open his book *War of the Worlds* (previously cited). Although I had read this article years ago while doing previous research, I was only reminded of it when I read Slouka's opening chapter and I want to be sure to give him full credit for that.

[516] A particularly entertaining article on the humor website *Cracked.com* makes this point quite elegantly: "Every year, Hollywood pumps out 'historical' epics so distorted, propagandistic and self-serving, you have to wonder just how stupid they think we are. But try 'fixing' some of those historical inaccuracies and you'll quickly realize what Hollywood screenwriters have known for years: History is *lame* [and we're] glad no one gives a damn about trivial things like 'what actually happened.'" Michael Swaim, "11 Movies Saved by Historical Inaccuracy," *Cracked*, July 10, 2007, accessed May 27, 2012, http://www.cracked.com/article_15014_11-movies-saved-by-historical-inaccuracy.html, par. 1.

[517] Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Evens in the American Century* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 211.

narrative and Abu Ghraib counter-narrative, as I suggest these films are a significant part of the cultural discourse. Here and in the succeeding chapter, I will perform a frame genre criticism of the films under consideration that looks at the descriptive and attributive frames. In Chapter 6, I will take up the affective frame as it relates to trauma and the psychotherapeutic potential in film.

The events of September 11, 2001 have spawned an entire sub-genre of films in its own right, but as Brian Marder notes, "there has to date been no attempt to make an all-encompassing film" about the day itself.[518] Although there are a number of films that depict the events of September 11, my analysis of the "Nine-Eleven films" will be limited to *World Trade Center* (2006) and *United 93* (2006). In part, this is because these two films were among the first produced and screened, and they had the largest budgets and widest distribution (resulting, in turn, the widest viewership). In short, *World Trade Center* and *United 93* are touchstone Nine-Eleven films. I also chose these two films because they represent what has been called Hollywood's "narrative whole," meaning that they stand in for the dominant narrative in popular culture.[519] The second set of films I analyze are what I term the "Testimonial films." These are documentary films that attempt to let the soldiers directly involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal tell their story

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[518] Brian Marder, "Ten Years Later: Categorizing the 9/11 Films," Hollywood, September 11, 2011, accessed April 13, http://www.hollywood.com/news/movies/7837169/ten-years-later-categorizing-the-9-11-films?page=all, par. 1. Marder separates the films into the following categories: Sentimental Heroism like *World Trade Center*, Docudramas like *United 93*, Documentaries like *Fahrenheit 9/11*, September 11 subplots like *Reign Over Me*, and films with a thematic similarity like *War of the Worlds*.

[519] Just as news reports that focus on single issues stand in for the complexity of social interactions too large for audiences to see, these two films stand in for the whole of the dominant narrative in popular culture. Further, it is important that these two films were released at the peak of the torture porn cycle because a key focus of this project is on the rhetorical negotiation between film genres. A possible reason there are fewer of these films (when compared to torture porn) is because they didn't have to re-write the narrative, but only calcify the administration's missives and the MNO coverage. For evidence that these were the two most noteworthy Nine-Eleven films, see Dave White, "Hollywood Struggles with 9/11 Films," Today Entertainment, September 7, 2011, accessed March 12, http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/44260709/ns/today-entertainment/t/hollywood-struggles-films/#.T7PucmC4LJw.

themselves. The two films that I consider here are the critically-acclaimed documentaries Rory Kennedy's *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007) and Errol Morris' *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). Both of these films were made by well-respected documentary filmmakers and have won multiple awards.[520] In this chapter, I will perform a frame genre criticism and look for illuminating patterns between the films that were released around the time period of the Abu Ghraib scandal. Toward that end, I will first analyze the Nine-Eleven films, then the Testimonial films, and finally, outline the dialectic that occurs between the two sets of texts as a master narrative and a counter-narrative.

THE NINE-ELEVEN FILMS

As John W. Jordan notes, the Nine-Eleven films were mainstream "Hollywood's attempts to construct civic memories," and "became not just a film, but a gauge of the nation's sensibilities."[521] Both *World Trade Center* and *United 93* (re)tell the Nine-Eleven narrative, each from a different perspective. *World Trade Center* confines its story mostly to ground zero and the various places the protagonists' families are. The bulk of its story takes place after the collapse of the towers and focuses on the inaction of people

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[520] Rory Kennedy has won critical acclaim for multiple documentaries, including *American Hollow, A Boy's Life,* and *The Homestead Strike*. Michael Machosky, "History Channel Recognizes Homestead Strike," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, April 9, 2006. LexisNexis. Her film, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, was critically hailed when it first aired on HBO and was nominated for four Emmy Awards, winning the Emmy for Outstanding Nonfiction Special. Emma D. Sapong, "Chilling Documentary by Rory Kennedy Examines Torture," *Buffalo News*, October 19, 2007, Gusto section, Central edition. LexisNexis. For his part, Errol Morris is an Academy Award-winning director (for *The Fog of War*) whom Seth Stevenson called a "genius documentarian." Seth Stevenson, "Back to the Drawing Board," *Slate Magazine*, April 16, 2007. LexisNexis. His film, *Standard Operating Procedure*, won the Silver Bear Jury Grand Prize at its debut in the 58th Berlin International Film Festival, received overwhelmingly favorable reviews and was called "visually stunning, with the production values of a Hollywood psychological thriller" by film critic Eric Harrison. "Morris Lets Relentless Lens Do Work for 'Standard Operating Procedure'," *States News Service*, April 29, 2008. LexisNexis. Eric Harrison, "Of Style and Substance," *The Houston Chronicle*, May 24, 2008, Star section, 3 Star edition. LexisNexis. In addition to the film, *Standard Operating Procedure* also had a companion book by the same name that Morris wrote with investigative journalist Philip Gourevitch.

[521] John W. Jordan, "Transcending Hollywood: The Referendum on 'United 93' as Cinematic Memorial," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25 (2008): 218-219. EBSCOhost (31937699).

and the action of the government. In contrast, *United 93* jumps back and forth between the offices of the Northeast Air Defense Sector, the National Air Traffic Control Center, various local Air Traffic Control centers, and on-board the plane itself. The film attempts to tell the story "as it happened" in a mimicry of "real time."[522] The entirety of the story takes place before the towers collapse and focuses on the inaction of the government in contrast to the action of individual citizens.

For the reader who has not seen *World Trade Center* or *United 93*, here is a short synopsis of each, both of which unfold in a plot pacing that can be divided into three acts.[523] In *World Trade Center*, Act I introduces us to the primary protagonists as the audience watches them make their way into work and begin their day on the morning of September 11, 2001.[524] The inciting incident occurs at the nine-minute mark when the

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[522] The film opens with the hijackers preparations before leaving for the airport, which we can assume to be around 7:00 am. United 93 crashes at 10:03 am, which means the film covers approximately three hours of "real time" events. The running time on the film is 111 minutes, or just under two hours. If you remove the morning "preparation time" of the antagonists and "begin" the movie when FAA National Operation Manager Ben Sliney arrives at work, the times between "real world" and "cinematic" events are even closer.

[523] In these synopses, I will use the language of Syd Field from his text, *Screenplay*. Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1979 [2005]). There are several different texts that one could use to understand story structure, from *On Poetics* to Robert McKee's famous *Story* (if there is a screenwriting book more influential that Field's, it would most certainly be McKee's), see Robert McKee, *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1997). I chose Field as my touchstone for structure primarily because it set the industry standard for screenplay structure and a book such as Field's will provide us with a consistent vocabulary that will make the theoretical points easier to illustrate. I believe the same points could be made using another structural vocabulary. The story begins with Act I, the *setup*, where we learn who the characters of our story are and the setting in which it will take place. After we learn the characters and setting, there is an *inciting incident*, which is the event that sets the story in motion. Act I ends with the *first plot point*, where the hero of our story takes on the problem. Act II, the *confrontation*, is filled with obstacles that prevent the hero from achieving his or her goal and getting what s/he wants. Near the middle of Act II, the obstacles seem too large to overcome and this is the lowest point for the hero, what Field calls the *midpoint*. At the end of Act II, there is the *second plot point*, which is when there is a fundamental change that moves the story inexorably toward conclusion. Act III, the *resolution*, is dominated by the *climax*, where the forces that were at tension with one another finally confront one another. During the climax, one side prevails and we move to the *denoument*, which is the period of calm before equilibrium is restored.

[524] *World Trade Center*, DVD, directed by Oliver Stone (2006; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2007).

first plane crashes into the World Trade Center.[525] The remainder of the first act is dominated by the mobilization of the rescue workers to ground zero and ends with the first plot point at the 17-minute mark when John McLoughlin (hereafter John; [played by Nicholas Cage]) asks for volunteers to go into the buildings. Act II is made up of the rescue efforts first by the protagonists and then for the protagonists after they become trapped. It includes not only the rescue efforts themselves, but the (in)actions of the families during this time. The midpoint, where things appear hopeless, occurs at the 61-minute mark when the trapped Port Authority officers, John and Will Jimeno (hereafter Will; [played by Michael Peña]), accept their seemingly inevitable death as more of the collapsed building falls around them. Act II ends at the 81-minute mark with the second plot point: when ex-Marine Dave Karnes (hereafter Karnes; [played by Michael Shannon]), looking through the wreckage alone, meets Marine Sergeant Jason Thomas (hereafter Thomas; [played by William Mapother]) and they agree to search the rubble together.[526] The climax of the film occurs at the 89-minute mark when Karnes and Thomas find the men trapped in the wreckage and the majority of Act III centers around saving John and Michael after they are discovered. The *denoument* of the film begins at the 114-minute mark when the surviving protagonists vocalize their plans for the future.

In *United 93*, Act I introduces us to the protagonists in much the same way as we saw in *World Trade Center* – the audience watches them begin their day in a very banal

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[525] To make things easier, the "time marks" in all film synopses will be rounded to the nearest half-minute, unless there is a specific reason not to do so. In this case, for example, the inciting incident actually occurs 8 minutes and 50 seconds into the film, but I rounded it up to nine minutes.

[526] Jason Thomas is listed only as Marine Sergeant Thomas in the film because neither the film's producers nor police could locate the man who had only referred to himself as "Sergeant Thomas" during the rescue efforts. As a result, the filmmakers admitted that they got "some of the details wrong" surrounding his story – including the fact that Thomas is African-American. He is played by white actor William Mapother in the film. Nancy Weiner, "Unknown Hero Discovers Himself in 'World Trade Center'," ABC News, August 9, 2006, accessed May 17, 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=2293067#.UAbvNGDL1vk.

fashion. A primary difference, however, is that *United 93* also devotes a large portion of Act I introducing the audience to the antagonists as well.[527] The inciting incident occurs at the 11-minute mark when the hijackers board the plane. The remainder of the first act shows the protagonists consumed with the routine of their daily lives and ends at the 18-minute mark when Boston air traffic controller Tom Roberts insists to his supervisor that American Airlines flight 11 has been hijacked. Act II is dominated by efforts, both on the ground and on-board United 93, to comprehend the extent of what is happening and to minimize the impact of the planned attack. The midpoint of Act II occurs at the 65-minute mark, when the hijackers have taken control of United 93, killed the pilots, and are less than an hour away from the Capitol Building (their planned target). This is magnified in the following few minutes when the audience learns that officials on the ground have no information regarding what is occurring in the air and that the military has only four unarmed planes at their disposal to protect the entire Eastern United States. Act II ends at the 85-minute mark, when the passengers on United 93 make the decision to fight back (the second plot point). The majority of the action in Act III takes place on the plane and the climax occurs at the 95-minute mark when the passengers launch their counter-offensive. There is no true *denoument* in *United 93* and narrative closure is provided by an abrupt cut to black as the plane crashes.

Nine-Eleven films: The descriptive frame

As detailed before, the descriptive frame attempts to provide an accurate picture of the event itself – in the cinematic context, this would include issues such as the characters (those we identify with), the scene (the geographic confines of the story), and the need for information to tell the story. The early parts of both of the Nine-Eleven

[527] *United 93*, DVD, directed by Paul Greengrass (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006).

films work to remind its audience who the American Subject is and what the scene was like before "the world changed forever." The first nine minutes of *World Trade Center* are devoted to an idealized memory of the world prior to the event. The first two and a half minutes are spent with John as he wakes up at 3:29 a.m. The alarm clock (ostensibly set for 3:30) never goes off and never disturbs his sleeping wife. He quietly showers, dresses, and checks on his four sleeping children. John is a good family man and the average American. As he drives into work the car radio tells us that it is a primary election day in New York and over 250 candidates are on the ballot. This detail echoes the part of the Nine-Eleven narrative that the world fundamentally changed that day. Prior to the event, politics was changed internally via an election; after the event, however, changes in politics were externally thrust upon us, a response to something we didn't expect or ask for. September 11, 2001 was a planned day of political change in New York, but not in the way it happened – the event fundamentally changed the rules of the game.

The next 30 seconds focus on the city itself, quiet and minding its own business. A nearly empty bus rumbles down a virtually deserted street. A lone man walks his dog as the city sleeps. In this sequence, the city takes on a life of its own, personified as calm and innocent.[528] Never mind that this is supposed to represent downtown Manhattan, the busiest section of the self-described "city that never sleeps." In the next minute and a half, the city begins to wake, an American flag blows softly in the wind, and the audience is introduced to Port Authority officers Will and Dominick Pezzulo (hereafter Dominick; [played by Jay Hernandez]) as they separately make their way into work. In the next 30

[528] This characterization of New York City fits in nicely with a thematic motif that followed the attacks. From September 11 through the end of the year, literally hundreds of articles appeared that referenced the United States as a "sleeping giant" that had been awoken. For an example, see Ron Martz and Don Melvin, "A Grim New Chapter in Terror," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 12, 2001, News section, Home edition. LexisNexis.

seconds, the audience watches Christopher Amoroso (played by Jon Bernthal) stare lovingly at the city skyline from the deck of the ferry he takes to work. Sounds from a radio broadcast announcing that "futures are up two points [and] NASDAQ futures [are] up 26" are juxtaposed over the famous Wall Street bull statue and a quick cut to the Statue of Liberty backlit by the sunrise. These images come together in such a way that suggests that freedom and capitalism are inexorably intertwined and bring with them the light of day. The city is now fully awake with Manhattan bustling and commuters commuting. Will drives into the city and sings along with the radio, which is playing "Only in America" by Brooks and Dunn.[529] The film then cuts to the Port Authority offices where the lives of these men converge. Before sending the officers out for the day, John closes the morning meeting by reminding them "As always, protect yourselves and watch each other's backs."[530] This line not only sets up the heroism of the protagonists in the film, but it also serves to remind the audience of the moral code established in the Nine-Eleven narrative. Of the upmost importance is security and it is important that you have someone that will "watch your back" to protect you from evil.

Act I of *United 93* confirms the Nine-Eleven narrative by not only reminding us who we *are*, which is the focus of *World Trade Center*, but also who we *are not*. The first three minutes of the film are focused on the hijackers themselves, showing them in prayer and preparing for the attack in their hotel room. When the hijackers arrive at the airport and go through the security checkpoint, their demeanor is in strike contrast to the other passengers. The hijackers are all focused; most of them stare straight ahead with a

[529] Will sings along to the following lyrics: "Sun coming up over New York City / School bus driver in a traffic jam / Staring at the faces in the rear view mirror." The camera then pans up and centers the World Trade Center in the frame as Will sings "Looking at the promise of the promised land." The bottom of the screen, underneath the city skyline, reads "September 11, 2001." Kix Brooks, Don Cook, and Ronnie Rogers, "Only In America," Arista Nashville (69130, 2001).

[530] This line also serves to foreshadow the thematic element of the disappearing / missing body that will dominate the second half of Act II.

steely resolve while one is nervous, but all have their minds focused firmly on what they intend to do. The other passengers, on the other hand, are unsuspecting, unprepared, and lost in their own worlds. One woman checks her watch as others talk on cell phones; the pilots, security agents, and flight attendants go through the motions of what appears to be another monotonous day at work. As the flight attendants deliver their rote security speech, the camera moves through the cabin where literally nobody is remotely paying attention. The hijackers exchange knowing looks and appear to be mentally preparing themselves. What is interesting about the first act of *United 93* is that the audience presumably already knows the story and how it will play out. They know that the current passivity of the crew and passengers will be replaced by a mid-air revolt. As such, the audience is given the opportunity to identify with the passengers without judging them. As the audience remembers the shock they personally experienced on that day, they are allowed to forgive the passengers for being unsuspecting, knowing that they will rise to the occasion in due time, much like the American military response in 2001.

A key theme in the descriptive frame is the importance of accurate information – a theme that it shares with the Nine-Eleven films. In *World Trade Center*, the first three minutes following the inciting incident are all centered around the need for information. Before the rescue workers are dispatched, a Port Authority official says, "They're telling us it's a commuter plane," and that the South tower is being evacuated "as a precaution." As the rescue workers are bussed to the site, an officer ends a phone call with his wife who said that the North tower was hit by a plane, but nobody can verify the information. Moments later, Will becomes upset when his colleague won't lend him the cell phone so that Will may call his wife for information as well. "It's no use," he's told. "The lines are busy." When asked what materials would be available at the rescue site, John says he isn't sure because nobody had planned for an effort of this magnitude. "There is no

plan," he says. "We didn't make it." At the 16-minute mark, they see the first person jump from the upper levels of the tower and one of the rescue workers asks, "How are you going to save people up that high? It's impossible." Early in the film, not only is accurate information at a premium, but the lack of information leads to blind responses and the perpetuation of misinformation as well. Firefighters are sent from Tower 1 to Tower 2 and, when asked why they are being moved, the answer is "I don't know." Moments later, as the Port Authority officers are gathering their supplies in the South Tower, one of the men says that he learned that Israel was under attack. These short sequences illustrate not only the need for accurate information, but the risk of misinformation leading to panic in an informational vacuum. This feeling of panic is accentuated after the protagonists become trapped and they have no idea if anyone is even looking for them.[531]

At the 35-minute mark in *World Trade Center*, there is a short sequence of people around the world watching the news reports and learning what had happened on their televisions. Two minutes later, this sequence is juxtaposed with scenes of the officers' families hoping to learn information about their loved ones. This focus on the families' reactions remains dominant up to the midpoint of Act II and goes from seeking basic information to a desire to be in touch with the latest developments at all times. For example, at the 46-minute mark, Will's wife Allison (played by Maggie Gyllenhaal) is on the phone trying to learn about Will's fate and she continues to ask the same question over and over again, "Did he go in the buildings or not?" Later, at the 72-minute mark, when she and the family makes a trip to the drug store for a prescription, she becomes outraged upon learning that nobody had brought a cell phone with them. These scenes

[531] This fear stemming from not knowing if anyone was coming for them is further illustrated when the men attempt to contact someone via the radio. John says he is unsure if his radio was strong enough to send a signal through the rubble or if it was even still working after the tower collapse.

illustrate that not only was access to basic information important, but the ability to receive the most updated (and presumably accurate) information was paramount.

In *United 93*, the need for timely and accurate information also dominated the narrative through the first half of the film. Air traffic controllers in the local centers work feverishly to establish contact with planes whose transponders had stopped transmitting. Very specific information such as map coordinates and altitude are charted on a second-by-second basis in hopes of knowing exactly where every plane is. At the national air traffic control center, information is equally important. At the 20-minute mark, immediately following first plot point at the Boston center, Ben Sliney, the head of the National Air Traffic Control Center, is told about the possible hijacking of American 11. Although Ben is initially dismissive, telling the informant to return only when she has "some hard information," he immediately tells the assembled officials there could be a possible hijacking. In this case, the information is disseminated, but it is quickly noted that it may not be accurate. After it becomes clear that there are multiple hijackings, National Air Traffic Control scrambles desperately to keep up with the information and misinformation that is coming in at a near constant rate. Ben demands that they set up a large board that keeps track of all possible and confirmed hijacked planes. Early in Act II, a plane that was initially thought to be hijacked is learned to be under pilot control and is immediately taken off the board, illustrating a focus on accurate information.

At NORAD, the military was grappling with their own information shortcomings. *United 93* shows the military discovering the organized nature of the attacks just like the rest of the country did – by watching CNN. After witnessing the second plane plow into the World Trade Center, Major James Fox orders his people to "put CNN up on Screen Three." Through most of Act II, the military officials struggled not only to learn what defenses they had at their disposal, but also to set clear rules of engagement. No matter

the literal strength of the United States military, it was functionally powerless absent information. Having an F-16 shoot down a commercial aircraft was a decision that could only be made by the president. And on the real United 93 itself, accurate information was of the upmost importance. Early in Act II, the passengers believe that the pilots are still alive and that the plane will be landed safely. Then one of the flight attendants sees that the pilots have been murdered. Sharing this information prompts frantic phone calls to loved ones and the organized nature of the attacks becomes apparent. It is as the passengers learn additional information that the story is propelled forward through the midpoint. At every level in the story, information is at a premium and a denial to that information is itself traumatizing. As Neil Narine writes, "Illuminating the traumatic underside of the network society, no civilian, official, authority figure, group, or government body in *United 93* is privy to enough information or context (despite being in perpetual contact in order to coordinate their complex tasks) to achieve his or her respective goals."[532] In both the media coverage of the event and the Nine-Eleven films, access to accurate information is the predominant focus in telling the story up through the midpoint of Act II.[533]

Nine-Eleven films: The attributive frame

The two themes that emerged from the attributive frame of the Nine-Eleven narrative were the move to action and the missing body. Let's turn our attention first to the move to action theme and see if there are examples in the Nine-Eleven films. At the 81-minute mark in *World Trade Center*, Karnes, who is searching the wreckage alone,

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[532] Neil Narine, "Global Trauma and the Cinematic Network Society," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27 (2010): 222. EBSCOhost (52444761).

[533] The importance of accurate information is made doubly clear when a German passenger (the only passenger the audience is not encouraged to identify with) leaps to his feet and attempts to tell the hijackers of the passengers' plan to fight back.

meets another Marine (Thomas), and the two begin searching together. Not only is this an example of the move to action theme, it represents a change in the tone of the film as it moves from Act II to Act III. Throughout Act II, the tone of the film was one of passivity, of things happening to people. Although there was heroic action by the protagonists in Act I, they have been trapped under debris for the majority of the second act. Similarly, the families in Act II have spent the majority of their time waiting – waiting for information, waiting for the missing body to reemerge, waiting for something to happen. For example, at the 57-minute mark, John's family fights with one another because the eldest son, J. J. (played by Anthony Piccininni), wants to go into the city to find his father. He is told to wait, that there's nothing he can do. At the same time, the audience sees no real depictions of any efforts to find the trapped rescue workers. We are shown that people are at the site, but there are no scenes of active recovery efforts. In fact, the only information the audience is given in relation to the rescue efforts themselves is when they decide to stop searching because of nightfall.

The passivity exhibited during Act II serves double duty for the film. First, it illustrates the feeling of impotence by the average American during this time of crisis, which likely reminds the typical audience member of the feelings of helplessness s/he felt the day of the event. Second, it serves to illustrate the literal powerlessness of the average American during this time of crisis. The exceptions to the Act II passivity are J. J. and Allison. At the 71-minute mark, for example, Allison insists on going to the drug store to pick up a prescription because, as she explains, she's "not sitting here waiting for a call that Will is dead." Two minutes later, as Allison become frustrated at having to wait at a red light, she jumps out of the car and starts to walk home. At the 77-minute mark, J.J. sits in the family car and refuses to leave. He screams at his mother Donna (played by Maria Bello), "What's wrong with you? Don't you want to find him?"

Donna responds, "There's nothing we can do. There's nothing we can do." J. J., undeterred, pleads, "What if he's dying? What if I never see him again?" Although Donna relents and agrees to drive J. J., it is evident that her actions are more to calm him than to accomplish anything. Through the actions of both Allison and J. J., the audience understands their desire to do *something*, but is also shown that such actions result in nothing of consequence. It is only the action of Karnes and Thomas (the representatives of the state) that have the potential to net positive results.

Act III of *World Trade Center* valorizes the move from passivity to action. At the 89-minute mark, when Karnes and Thomas find John and Will, Karnes says, "We're not leaving you, buddy. We're Marines. You are our mission." The action of Act III centers around securing John and Will by agents of the state: the Marines, the fire department and a paramedic. When we finally return to Donna, the first time she's on-screen since agreeing to drive J. J., she receives the phone call that John has been found. When she discovers that he is still trapped in the rubble, Donna says that she's going after him. After a Port Authority officer tells her "it's too dangerous," Donna asks where he will be taken so that she can meet him. Again, Donna cedes authority to the state to secure her husband. At the rescue site itself, John nearly dies before being extracted from the rubble. It is only the thought of his family that provides him the strength to persevere, which is the overarching theme of Act III – the security of the people one loves is all that matters. At the 110-minute mark, as Donna waits for John to come to the hospital, she talks with a mother whose son is missing. She laments that the last time she saw him, she yelled at him. "Now all I want to do is hold him," says the mother before she breaks down in tears. The camera moves through the hospital, where the walls are covered with homemade "missing persons" signs, all pleading for someone to find them, all ceding active agency. The films seems to suggest that feeling safe with those you love is the

most important thing, and it is the position and authority of the state that can provide you that feeling of security.

The valorization of action appears in *World Trade Center* even as the men are trapped in the debris. At the 61-minute mark, John, upset with himself that he led many of his men to death, is consoled by Will. "They did what they had to do, Sarge," Will says. "They couldn't live with themselves if they hadn't gone in. That's who they were." Seconds later, even more debris falls, the end for our protagonists seems inevitable, and both men seem to prepare themselves for death. When the falling debris doesn't kill them, however, Will again "gets his mind together" and calls out to see if his boss is still alive. It is during this sequence when Will stops calling John "Sarge," and starts calling him John. "John." Will shouts. "John are you there?" After a moment, John answers, "Yeah, I'm still here." Will's decision to dispense with the formalities and engage John as a friend illustrates they are no longer two rescue workers who are trapped, but two men who will actively face death on their own terms, as heroes.

In *United 93*, the move to action begins at the 53-minute mark when Ben tells the military liaison to the National Air Traffic Control Center that he "needs action" from the military. For the next 30 minutes, the film depicts those on the ground as trying desperately to take action, but being stifled by bureaucratic inaction. At the 85-minute mark, it is the individuals upon the flight itself that take up the call to action. Here, the passengers on-board the flight have learned that planes are being used as weapons and decide to fight back against the hijackers. At the 95-minute mark, the passengers on the plane fight back against the hijackers and ultimately overwhelm them. During the attack, one of the passengers brutally bashes in the skull of a hijacker while another breaks the neck of a different hijacker with his bare hands. The passengers then use the beverage cart to break down the cockpit door as the plane is flown into the ground. The plane

never reached its target in Washington, D.C. and the film's message is that the heroism of these everyday people, and their decision to take action, saved countless American lives.

As is the case with the master narrative first introduced by MNOs in the news, the theme of the missing body emerges from the Nine-Eleven films as well. Early in *World Trade Center*, before the attacks themselves, this theme is foreshadowed. When John first arrives at the Port Authority offices, early in Act I, a disheveled woman is being questioned. "Do you have anyone you can call?" she is asked. The woman shrugs. "Anybody?" the officer asks. The woman sadly shakes her head. The audience is asked to both understand the woman as a pathetic figure and identify the Port Authority officer as someone who helps those that have gone missing from society. This woman has disappeared, one of the cast off and silent voices of an invisible underclass. The Port Authority, in this context, saves not only the men and women missing from ground zero, but those that are the most vulnerable. This point is accentuated and reinforced at the 7-minute mark when an Inspector addresses the Port Authority field agents. He holds up a picture of a young child and says, Be on the lookout for this girl. Zooey Cowley, age 11. Runaway out of Rhode Island. Thought to be on a bus coming in this morning." The Port Authority agents all nod, but the Inspector feels the need to drive the point home. "This is important," he concludes.

After the collapse of the towers, the film illustrates the importance of the missing body. At the 30-minute mark, Dominick realizes he can't pull Will from the debris and says he is going to go get help. John screams, "No, no! You're going to get him out!" In this sequence, John believes that if Dominick (the only one of them who is not trapped) leaves, the chances of anyone finding them are slim. In this moment, Dominick alone knows where they are and he alone does not consider them missing. As such, in John's mind, Dominick alone holds the potential to save them. The significance of the missing

body is perhaps best seen when held up against its opposite. At the 41-minute mark, Port Authority officials arrive at the home of John's family and tension fills the air. John's wife, Donna, is told that they know exactly where John is, which relieves everyone. Even though this turns out to be untrue, the short-term belief that they can account for John reduces the family's anxiety and illustrates the magnitude of the missing body theme. Near the midpoint, Pat (John's brother who we learn is responsible for informing the family if anything happens to John in the line of duty) visits Donna at home. Her earlier relief, what she could account for John's whereabouts, is now replaced by dread and she refuses to let Pat bring her the bad news. "Don't come in here, Pat," Donna screams. "I mean it, don't come into this house." Pat attempts to console her by saying that they don't know anything definitive, but Donna breaks down in response. Even though Pat was not there to tell her that John was dead, his retraction of an earlier commitment to knowing where John was has left Donna mentally devastated. In this sequence, the audience sees the emotional impact that comes with learning that someone has gone missing. The scenes that immediately follow, however, illustrate the notion of the missing body as hopeful. In them, Will's wife, Allison, says, "They declared that he was missing. That's all. Just missing." Moments later, Allison's brother tells their mother, "Missing means missing, ma. It doesn't mean dead."[534] These two sequences, juxtaposed with each other, illustrate the dual nature of the missing body theme that

[534] Earlier, I made a differentiation between a body that had "disappeared" and a body that was "missing." My rhetorical analysis of the media coverage of the Nine-Eleven event, which helped construct the Nine-Eleven narrative, suggested that the two words were used to represent two distinct concepts. In this sequence, the word "missing" is used, but the concept is really one of "disappeared." There are many possible reasons for this, including imprecise script writing, "missing" being an official term in the field that is used, or even that the two concepts are no longer distinct when the film is released in 2006. Although I cannot say for certain, I am inclined to believe that the word "missing" was used in the script because it sounded more natural than the word "disappeared" when said in this context (as opposed to the more formalized context of a newspaper article, for example). Conceptually, however, the characters are making reference to a body that has disappeared, which mimics the structure of the Nine-Eleven narrative.

dominated a section of the Nine-Eleven narrative. It was at once hopeful, that the person who had disappeared would soon reemerge and come home, and haunting, that the person may never be recovered.

In *United 93*, because the film takes place in the hours before the towers collapse, the obstacle of the missing body is less pronounced. Even so, a thematic element of disappearance and loss pervades the film, which may spark a sense of resonance among spectators. For example, at the 16-minute mark of the film, the air traffic controller in Boston says that he just "lost" American 11, as it "dropped off" his radar. In an effort to find it again, the controller asks United 175 for a visual confirmation of the plane. Similarly, at the 35-minute mark, New York air traffic control says that American 11 "just disappeared over Manhattan." Throughout the film, there are multiple discussions of planes that are lost or missing. In this sense, the dual nature of the missing body is also seen. The audience is hopeful that a missing plane might reemerge and be "found" to be where it was supposed to be, as the Delta flight that was mistakenly believed to have been hijacked in Act II. Conversely, the missing plane may also bring with it ultimate devastation, and it is the audience's knowledge that many of these planes will bring devastation that sets up the urgency of the missing body.

I have previously noted that although the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films are not horror films proper, they do contain horrifying elements to them, participating in affective "horror" regardless of traditional generic constraints. In *World Trade Center*, this horrifying element appears from within the missing body theme as it relates to abjection and bodily integrity. From the 16-minute mark until the 20-minute mark, the protagonists prepare themselves for the rescue effort by protecting themselves against abjection that threatens their bodily integrity. For Kristeva, external threats to the body are the marks of abjection, a horrifying eruption of the Real. She notes, "The body must

bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic."[535] Turning back to *World Trade Center,* we find many examples of bodily integrity. To protect rescue workers against the impurity of the air, John directs them to collect facemasks from a supply closet. "We aren't rescuing anybody if we can't breathe," he says. As the rescue workers collect supplies, scenes of bodily damage surround them. The people leaving the towers have visible injuries; a woman, covered in blood, runs by screaming that she's on fire. As explained through a news report shown moments later, "People were coming out with masks over their face, anything they could put over their face because the air was so thick with debris. The ash on the ground is at least two-inches thick."

This protection of bodily integrity is accentuated in *World Trade Center* after the collapse of the towers. At the 25-minute mark, in an effort to protect themselves from the falling building, the protagonists dash into an elevator shaft. John wakes buried in debris and shouts for his crew to "sound off." John and Will are both alive, but are pinned under the debris and unable to move. Dominick has both survived and is able to move, so he begins to slowly move to help his friends. He crawls to Will and puts an oxygen mask to his face, allowing him to breathe in the cool, pure air. A few minutes later, however, more of the structure collapses and crushes much of Dominick's body. He bleeds from his mouth and struggles for breath before dying painfully. Through nearly all of Act II, the men lie trapped in the rubble, unable to move. At several points during this time, the two surviving men make reference to their collapsing bodily integrity. At one point, John complains of his aching thirst, to which Will responds, "You're not kidding. My mouth feels like a beach." At the 44-minute mark, flaming debris begins to

[535] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 102.

fall on the men, melting their flesh. The men scream out in pain and John begins to shout almost incoherently about his crushed legs and his inability to ever walk again. Will also panics and begins to scream. After a moment, John collects himself and demands that Will "get his mind together." Further, starting at the 63-minute mark, there are multiple sequences that connect the abject nature of the scene to the obstacle of the missing body. The audience sees first responders, covered in ash and blood, some wearing facemasks, many more coughing. The streets are covered in charred clothing and twisted metal as fires continue to burn and even more ash fills the air. A Marine surveys the devastation and says, "It looks like God made a curtain with the smoke, shielding us from what we are not yet ready to see." It is this sentiment, the inability to see, which lies at the core of the missing body theme.

In this section, I performed a frame genre analysis and found definite patterns between the Nine-Eleven films and the themes used to construct the Nine-Eleven narrative. Specifically, in Act I and early in Act II, there was a premium on information and defining both who the American Subject is and who s/he is not. As Act II played forward, two themes emerged that were also found in the construction of the Nine-Eleven narrative: the move to action and the missing body. When examined through the descriptive and attributive frames, these patterns, coupled with a structural similarity, suggest that the Nine-Eleven films can be read as a part of the larger Nine-Eleven master narrative. As the previous chapter outlined, however, this master narrative was not without its detractors, and the Abu Ghraib scandal specifically, threatened its smooth functioning. With that in mind, I will turn my attention now to the Testimonial films, which act as a counter-narrative.

THE TESTIMONIAL FILMS

Unlike the master narrative that was advanced by the administration and the MNO coverage, and (re)told through the Nine-Eleven films, the Testimonial films provide a counter narrative that complicates and unsettles the master narrative. As before, I will provide a short synopsis of the two films discussed to make it easier for the reader to follow the analysis.[536] In the first Acts of both *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* and *Standard Operating Procedure*, we are introduced to the characters, which are made up of the soldiers deployed in Abu Ghraib and several legal and political commentators. The inciting incident is the Bush administration's decision to begin a military campaign against Iraq.[537] The remainder of Act I deals with the military deployment in Iraq ending with the deployment of the 372nd Military Police Company to Abu Ghraib (the first plot point). The first half of Act II details the physical and logistical obstacles associated with the daily operations at Abu Ghraib. These obstacles gradually escalate to the point where abuse, and possible torture, is becoming commonplace within the prison. The midpoint of Act II occurs when a "ghost detainee" dies during an interrogation conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency. After the midpoint, not only does the prisoner abuse escalate to certain torture, the soldiers are encouraged and even commended for engaging in it. Act II ends with at the second plot point when Sergeant Joe Darby turned over hundreds of photographs depicting acts of torture by U.S. military personnel to the Army

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[536] It should be noted that due to their documentary format, the Testimonial films follow a different plot progression from the fictional films analyzed which makes their description through Field's structure a little more difficult. According to MacDougall, documentary films "often seek to stand outside the narratives provided by their human subjects. Instead, they situate these stories in a structure which at times relies on them for narrative impetus but otherwise seeks to create its own narrative about an historical period or political issue." MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 240.

[537] Although there is a difference between these two films (which will be discussed in the frame sections below), they attempt to tell the same basic story and feature interviews with nearly all of the same people. I'll footnote the specific film followed by a minute-marker rounded to the nearest half minute. In this case, the inciting incident is the Bush speech announcing his intent to invade Iraq and "smoke [the terrorists] out." *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, DVD, directed by Rory Kennedy (New York, NY: HBO Home Video, 2007).

Criminal Investigation Command (which investigates felonies and violations of military law for the Army). Finally, the climax of Act III in both films is the public release of the photographs and the response by the administration, the media and the public. The *denoument* of both films engages how the Abu Ghraib scandal impacted the soldiers involved and the authorities upon whose orders they acted.

The most obvious difference between the Testimonial Films and the others analyzed here is their documentary nature, so a short word on the power of documentary films might be helpful. Speaking to the potential of documentary films to shape the discursive negotiation of national memory, Lena Khor argues that documentaries hold the potential to "subvert attempts by the state to suppress popular memory and rewrite national history."[538] For José Rabasa, documentaries can write a "history that effectively counters the hegemony of state historiography" and undo "the attempt to manufacture a historical framework that would generalize all discussions of the event in conformity with the [state's] perspective."[539] Roxana Waterson notes that documentaries have become "increasingly important vehicles of memory" and the new technologies of the next few years will make these film an even more important "form of witnessing of current events and therefore of future historical evidence."[540] With a nod toward Kristeva, Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker argue that documentaries featuring testimonies of human suffering carry a "quality of abjection" and imbued with a "precious, horrifying, faceted,

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[538] Lena Khor, "A Review of Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering," *Peace Review* 23 (2011): 261. EBSCOhost (61012044).

[539] José Rabasa, "On Documentary and Testimony: The Revisionists' History, the Politics of Truth, and the Remembrance of the Massacre at Acteal, Chiapas," in *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, eds. Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (New York: Routledge, 2010), 174.

[540] Waterson, "Trajectories of Memory," 52. She concludes, "film has become a vehicle for memory of traumatic events, the remembering of which is a political necessity if we are to find ways to make perpetrators accountable for past attracities, and work to prevent their recurrance." Waterson, "Trajectories of Memory," 56.

institutionally related, liminal force" that holds transformative potential.[541] Noting the Bush administration's "unprecedented opaqueness and concealment" in relation to the War on Terror, Hilary Neroni argues that the Testimonial films considered here "represent major interventions into the contemporary political landscape, and their success at the level of facts is unqualified."[542]

In the context of Abu Ghraib, these insights are doubly important because much of the public debate has centered on the "leaked" photographs themselves, the pictures that (presumably) tell the story. For David Bianculli, they tell us what happened in the prison.[543] For Myriam Marquez, they not only tell the story of torture, but of the total failure of the Iraq war. She writes that the Abu Ghraib "pictures aren't just worth 1,000 words of shock an disgust throughout the world. For Iraqis souring to the U.S. occupation … those pictures constitute an encyclopedia of U.S. betrayal."[544] Philip Gourevitch, however, reminds us that, "photographs cannot tell stories. They can only provide evidence of stories, and evidence is mute; it demands investigation and interpretation. … [A] photograph can best be understood not as an answer or an end to inquiry, but as an invitation to look more closely, and to ask questions."[545] In both *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* and *Standard Operating Procedure*, the filmmakers hope to do just that –

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[541] Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker, "Introduction: Moving Testimonies," in *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, eds. Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.
[542] Hilary Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile of the Torturer: Documentary Form and the Logic of Enjoyment," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3 (2009): 245. EBSCOhost (2010442011).
[543] In his review of the PBS documentary *The Torture Question*, Bianculli writes, "it's not the pictures that tell the story in *The Torture Question*. The Abu Ghraib photos from 2004 did that already." David Bianculli, "Looking at Abu Ghraib's Painful 'Question'," *Daily News*, October 18, 2005, Television section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[544] Myriam Marquez, "This is Not Who Americans Are as a People," *Tulsa World*, May 6, 2004, Syndicated section, Final Home edition. LexisNexis.
[545] Gourevitch and Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure*, 148.

to ask the deeper questions and tell the story beyond the still images of the now-infamous pictures.[546] In these films, the soldiers are depicted

> as victims of the system, [tracing] the line of responsibility to the very top, where mutterings about working the 'dark side,' deliberate conflation of Iraq with September 11 and indistinct directives on standard operating procedure regarding the treatment of prisoners allowed a bilious atmosphere to develop.[547]

For film scholar David MacDougall, the documentary film can coordinate our understanding of recent history because "we remember not the events themselves (we were not present at them) but the films and photographs we have seen of them [and] these may create a commonality of experience more powerful and consistent as social memory than the experiences of many of the actual participants."[548] In the case of Abu Ghraib, these documentaries hope to provide the story beyond the frame of the pictures.

Testimonial films: The descriptive frame

For the Testimonial films, establishing characters that the audience can sympathize with is a difficult task. By the time these films had been released, the administration's "bad apple" narrative had been in constant rotation for several years. Virtually all of the soldiers interviewed had been demoted and dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Army, and many of them had served prison time. Coupled with the knowledge that they also engaged in the torture of prisoners, it is reasonable to assume that an audience member would have a preconceived notion of these men and women as heartless if not outright evil. For its part, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* works to build an empathetic feeling in the audience by presenting the soldiers as average Americans who

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[546] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. *Standard Operating Procedure*, DVD, directed by Errol Morris (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008).
[547] Peter Watts, "Book of the Week - 'Standard Operating Procedure'," *Time Out*, June 5, 2008. LexisNexis. This article is referencing Philip Gourevitch's book in particular, but noted that it was made in conjunction with Morris' film and I feel the comment is representative of Kennedy's film as well.
[548] MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 233.

loved their country and found themselves in a harrowing and unwinnable position.[549] For some of the soldiers, the decision to join the military was a patriotic response to Nine-Eleven. Specialist Megan Ambuhl said, ""The ultimate reason I joined was to be a part of the effort to make the country a safer place. I wanted to help protect our country so that these people that wanted to come in and attack us wouldn't come in and do that again."[550] According to Sergeant Javal Davis, Nine-Eleven "made [him] feel like someone has to pay. We can't let two buildings get blown up and not do anything about it."[551] For others, they had joined the Army reserves to take advantage of benefits like

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[549] This also works to paint a larger picture of the American subject as these figures can act as stand-ins for all Americans. Making early references to the Vietnam War and noting that most of these soldiers were reservists, the film suggests that any one of us could have joined / been called up / drafted and deployed to Abu Ghraib. This is made even more explicit in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, which opens with the famous Stanley Milgram experiments where subjects were instructed to shock another person by an authority figure. In this experiment, Milgram found that most "average" people would ignore their personal conscience and do harm to another if instructed to do so by a person or institution they believed to be authoritative. The opening sequence opens with footage of the experiment and concludes with the statement that, "all of the subjects administered shocks. The majority did so at the maximum level: 450 volts." The film then cuts immediately to video of bound detainees being dragged along the floor at Abu Ghraib. Though not a part of the Testimonial films, the Milgram experiments offer another interesting insight – prior to the experiment (which was conducted in conjunction with a senior-level Psychology course at Yale University), the students were asked to predict the results. They predicted that only 1.2% of the subjects would follow through all thirty progressions of shocks, ending at 450 volts, two stages past the label that read "Danger: Severe Shock;" in fact, at the two last levels, 435 and 450 volts were just labeled as "XXX." Further, the shocked "victim" stopped all response after twenty levels, which could lead the subject to believe that severe, possibly even fatal, harm was being done, though they were assured the damage was only temporary. The students watched the experiment with "disbelief" as all of the subjects progressed through at least twenty levels (the last was the highest level of "intense shock") and over 65% of them progressed through ten levels of victim non-response to the maximum voltage. What we can take from this in terms of Act I of the Testimonial films is that there seems to be a tendency for people to believe that conscience will trump obedience, even though that doesn't seem to be the case. As such, it could be expected that an audience member would believe that s/he would not have followed orders even if they had been deployed to Abu Ghraib, which makes it all the more imperative that the soldiers are painted with a sympathetic brush if the films are to achieve their intended affective results. For more details on the experiment, see Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963). EBSCOhost (abn-67-4-371).

[550] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 5:00. This statement comes immediately following news footage of the Pentagon attack and an aerial shot of the ground zero site on September 11, 2001 with ash and smoke still streaming into the air.

[551] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 5:00. There are two prominent men with the last name Davis in these films, so they will be referred to by their first names moving forward.

college tuition waivers before they were ultimately called up and deployed. Israel Rivera says that he was in his college Algebra II class the morning of September 11 and remembers asking himself, "how is this going to affect me?"[552] In contrast, *Standard Operating Procedure* spends its opening moments focusing on the conditions at Abu Ghraib. The effect on the audience can be similar in that it explains how fundamentally good people can be driven to do horrible things, but does so by shifting the agency from the soldier to the scene.[553]

In addition to establishing with whom to identify, the descriptive frame also puts a premium on information. In the Testimonial films, the value of information plays a primary role in multiple incarnations, creating a sense of despair. In *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, General Janis Karpinski, the supervising General in Iraq, noted that she was "practically pleading for resources" and logistical information on "almost a daily basis," to no avail.[554] There is a feeling of frustration and hopelessness in these testimonies surrounding information, contrasted with the Nine-Eleven films, where the lack of information created a feeling of dread. According to Karpinski, there were not enough personnel deployed to the prison site to carry out the operation, with six or seven guards in charge of over 1,000 prisoners at the hard site.[555] None of the soldiers deployed to Abu Ghraib had volunteered to work the hard site and both Sergeant Sabrina Harman and Ambuhl were sent to work on Tier 1b for the sole reason that they were women.[556]

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[552] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 4:30.

[553] This point will be taken up in more detail when I discuss the move to action theme in the next section.

[554] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 18:30. I refer to Karpinski as a General, which she was at the time of the event, though she was ultimately demoted after the Abu Ghraib scandal and retired from the U.S. Army as a Colonel.

[555] The "hard site" was the name of Tier 1a and 1b, where the "high value" prisoners were kept.

[556] There are two explanations for why women soldiers / guards were deployed to the hard site. The first explanation was that they needed women to guard Tier 1b, which is where the women and children (usually wives and children of "high value targets" that had eluded capture) were held. The second explanation was that it was a tactic to "soften up" the prisoners, whose culture would (presumably) dictate that they would

Ambuhl said that the number of prisoners was so overwhelming that an organized attack by them would quickly overpower and overrun the guards. "It was such a scary situation to live under," she confessed.[557]

Compounding that problem was the lack of training given to the soldiers. Javal notes that the 372nd MP company was assigned to act as prison guards even after their commanding officer noted that their job was not corrections and they "haven't been trained to do anything like that." They were instructed to surrender their weapons and were no longer considered field soldiers. "We became prison guards with no training whatsoever," Javal recounts. It was that moment, Sergeant Ken Davis says, that company morale hit "rock bottom."[558] Not only did these soldiers have no training as prison guards, they were put in charge of training new Iraqi guards so that control of the corrections system could be turned over to them. Karpinski noted that "somebody had this crazy idea that they could restore all of the prison systems and get the new Iraqi guards re-trained in the right way to do an appropriate prison operation in 90 days or less. There was no plan for anything."[559] And this lack of training was exacerbated by a set of instructions that were either non-existent or changed on almost a daily basis. Specialist Roman Krol said the changing standards were "confusing" and Ken noted that, "it was never clear to me what was allowed and what was not allowed. … No one could answer questions for us."[560] This lack of information to the soldiers was especially frustrating, according to Ken, because many of them had never been deployed to a war zone before.

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be embarrassed to be both controlled and ridiculed by women. The truth most likely lies in both of these explanations – that the original deployment was to guard Tier 1b and, as the abuse and torture escalated, the gendered ridicule became more prominent.

[557] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 24:30.

[558] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 19:30.

[559] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 18:30.

[560] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 35:00.

Ken relates a story about a time when he had volunteered to be the rear gunner on a helicopter and asked for the rules of engagement. Ultimately he is told, "If it looks like the enemy, shoot it," to which Ken replied, "I've never really been outside of the United States. Everything looks like the enemy to me out here."[561]

In *Standard Operating Procedure*, the same wearisome story is told. At the most basic level, the soldiers themselves were frustrated by the lack of clear information and cleanly defined rules of engagement. As Javal describes his first experience at Abu Ghraib and the constant shelling of the prison, he recalls that nobody could tell him "if we can shoot back."[562] And the population at the prison kept growing because, as Karpinski explained, "nobody really had a plan on how you [would] release a formerly known as suspected terrorist of an associate of a terrorist." General Wojokowski instructed her to hold everyone who had been arrested, regardless of their guilt or if they had "actionable information." According to Karpinski, Wojokowski said to her, "You are not to release anybody, do you understand me? If any one of these prisoners gets released or ends up out of the streets, I'm coming after you."[563] Specialist Lynndie England said that her average day would consist of processing new prisoners throughout the night, reporting for guard duty at 6am, an increasingly short number of hours for her to sleep during the daytime, and then back to processing.[564] From within the descriptive frame, the fundamental problem was that access to accurate and timely information seemed an impossible luxury through the smoke and haze of the bureaucratic battlefield.

The danger of such an informational shortcoming was highlighted by the fact that, for Mark Danner, the war in Iraq, more than any other, relied on "information derived

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[561] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 13:00.
[562] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 13:30.
[563] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 21:00.
[564] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 13:00.

from prisoners of war."[565] According to *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib,* the commanding officers knew the importance of prisoner information and this was related to the soldiers on the ground. Ambuhl explained that they were all told that the information gathered from the interrogations was instrumental to the success in the war effort; they "were told that these detainees were the worst of the worst and that this information that we were going to get was going to save lives."[566] Unfortunately, this push for information did not always result in intelligence that was helpful in the war effort. According to Specialist Tony Lagouranis, in the early stages of the war, soldiers began performing village sweeps and making mass arrests based on minimal information. For example, if the soldiers were told by their superior officers that a suspect drove a black car, the soldiers would just arrest everyone who had a black car and people were being picked up on hunches and false leads such that "they just arrested everyone."[567] The inefficiency of these mass arrests (in terms of information gathering) were "extremely frustrat[ing]" to the interrogators, said Lagouranis. According to General Karpinski, almost 80% of the people interrogated had literally no information to provide and there were interrogators who spent an entire year at the prison without producing a single piece of "actionable intelligence."[568] According to *Standard Operating Procedure*, these mass arrests only became larger in scope as the occupation moved forward. According to Javal, soldiers would often go into villages and arrest literally every male of fighting age and bring them back to the prison "in cattle trucks." Most of these men, of course, were not part of the Iraqi resistance nor did they have any information that would help the American war

[565] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 9:00.
[566] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 25:00.
[567] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 14:00.
[568] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 25:30.

effort. These men were "taxi cab drivers and welders [and] bakers," Javal explained. "And they're at Abu Ghraib."[569]

For the administration, the lack of information was alarming and a sense of dread began to set in. According to Danner in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, the thought in the Pentagon was that information was the only way to put down the urban insurgency and there was a "panic about the lack of intelligence and lack of knowledge about the insurgency." Horton added that Rumsfeld himself was particularly upset and demanded to know why they were receiving intelligence from prisoners at Guantanamo Bay but not Abu Ghraib. For Rumsfeld, the solution was simple – send General Miller (who ran the prison operations in Guantanamo Bay) to Abu Ghraib and "Gitmoize the situation and do it fast."[570] For Danner, the centrality of information drove the warfighting doctrine: "rules regarding interrogation, what you could and couldn't do to prisoners, were absolutely central to fighting this new war."[571] For the soldiers, however, these rules were either unclear or seemed to suggest torturous behavior – complicated by the fact that they were often interrogating prisoners who had no intelligence to offer.

This impact of this doctrine is driven home in *Standard Operating Procedure* where it is noted that, when a premium is put on the information itself, how one has to go about getting it becomes secondary. Karpinski claims that they were told to do whatever they had to do to produce "actionable intelligence." "It's a downward spiral," she said. What you're doing "isn't working, try this. This worked in Gitmo. This worked in Bagram. Try this, it's okay."[572] In fact, Ambuhl also described her role in a typical

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[569] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 23:00.
[570] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 28:00. It is interesting to note that more than one person used the word "Gitmoize" to describe Miller's impact on Abu Ghraib. Later research might look at the development of this word as a term of art or possibly even as evidence of torture as policy.
[571] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 9:00.
[572] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 85:00.

interrogation: she would "cut off all his clothes with a knife. Burn him with a cigarette. We just do what they want us to do … [because] we're being told that it's helping to save lives."[573] According to Interrogator Tim Dugan, beliefs such as what Ambuhl expressed were born from a lack of training amongst the soldiers.[574] It was this lack of training, he argues, that led to the escalatory pattern that resulted in abuse, at best, and torture at worst. He describes the interrogators at Abu Ghraib as "a bunch of unprofessional schmucks who didn't know their damn job, all thrown together and mixed up with a big ass stick. And what you get from it is the shit you see on the news from Abu Ghraib."[575] The reason for the escalatory pattern, according to Dugan, is that once it begins, torture stops being a means to an end and becomes an end in and of itself. As evidence, he tells the story of an interrogation he witnessed where they were hoping to learn the location of Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri (Hussein's second-in-command) from a captured Iraqi general. According to Dugan, the general was willing to comply and give all the information they wanted at the beginning, but none of the interrogators would ask where al-Douri was; it appeared as if the interrogators wanted the general to appear uncooperative so that they could torture him. After they humiliated and shaved him from head to toe, Dugan says, the general was no longer willing to work with the interrogators and they ultimately learned no information.[576]

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[573] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 39:00.

[574] Tim Dugan was a civilian interrogator employed by the CACI Corps (a private intelligence gathering firm) that was sent to Abu Ghraib to assist Military Intelligence. At one point, Dugan relates a story about an attempt to interrogate an older Iraqi official by the "kids" the Army has employed in Military Intelligence. He says that he watches the interrogators ineptitude for a while and then takes control himself. He tells the Iraqi official that he understands why he doesn't respect the young MIs, and then intimidates him by letting the prisoner know that he (Dugan) is not part of the military. Less than five minutes later, Dugan says, the prisoner told him "everything [he] wanted to know." *Standard Operating Procedure*, 49:00. The implication here is that because Dugan is a civilian and an independent contractor, he is not bound by treaties like the Geneva Convention. Although this is untrue, the audience is left to think that such threats produce results, which may explain why the torture ultimately occurred.

[575] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 27:00.

[576] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 36:00.

Testimonial films: The attributive frame

In the attributive frame of the Nine-Eleven films, two themes emerged: the move to action and the missing body. These two themes appear in the Testimonial films, as well, but with significant differences. Looking first at the move to action theme, the Testimonial films seem to suggest that the soldiers were driven by the horrible conditions at the prison and the mental state it pushed them into – they ceased to be active agents and were instead passive tools. *Standard Operating Procedure* opens with a voiceover where Dugan says, "you gotta consider yourself dead. … If you're there and you consider yourself already dead, then you can do all the shit you have to do."[577] Frontloading this information helps paint the soldiers as products of the situation more than anything else.[578] When discussing the savage beating of several prisoners that had been accused of rape, Krol uses the scene to explain why the beating took place.[579] The constant mortar fire had driven him to the edge, he explains, and when he heard what the prisoners were accused of, he "just went nuts."[580] The film asks us to understand, and presumably excuse, Krol's behavior because it was a result of the scene, but never interrogates how the scene might have impacted the prisoners.

In *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib,* Javal says, "That place turned me into a monster. I was very angry. Being at Abu Ghraib can change your whole mindframe. You can go from being a docile, you know, jolly guy [and] you become a robot."[581] Harman described the

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[577] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 1:00.

[578] There is a fair amount of research that illustrates how a story is framed can impact agency. In this context, agency is removed from the soldiers and pushed onto the scene; they had no choice but to behave as the scene demanded them to. This strategy was outlined wonderfully in an essay that examined the media coverage of the shooting of Karen Wood. See Mari Boor Tonn, Valerie Endress, and John Diamond, "Hunting and Heritage on Trial: A Dramatistic Debate Over Tragedy, Tradition and Territory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993).

[579] It is also important to note that there was never a trial for these men – it was just accepted that the accusations were true.

[580] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 32:00.

[581] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 2:00.

impact Abu Ghraib had on her. "Something in your brain clicks that everything you see is normal. I mean you'll go crazy if you don't adapt to what you're seeing. You've got to block it out, do something to make your day go by without going crazy."[582] In this case, the soldiers were driven to behave the way they did as a result of the horrifying conditions that surrounded them. Krol described Abu Ghraib as horrifying and Javal noted that the soldiers slept in cells themselves. Ken called Abu Ghraib a "desert bowl of misery."[583] Several of the soldiers made special note of the constant shelling the prison received, described by many of them as "daily." Harman noted that nobody "felt safe being there" and Javal said he "wouldn't wish it on [his] worst enemy."[584] What is telling about Javal's comment is that one could assume that the prison was, in fact, populated with his "worst enemies." The disconnect he displays illustrates that the scenic agency is dominant only in relation to the soldiers, but not to the prisoners themselves.

In both films, the horror of Abu Ghraib was so commonplace that it became routine. In *Standard Operating Procedure,* England noted that often prisoners would be put into stress positions or be made to do squats on boxes while the soldiers would watch a movie on their laptops as though nothing was going on. Javal asked why the prisoners in the hard site were kept in isolation and handcuffed in stress positions only to be told, "That's military intelligence. Stay out of their way."[585] England notes that, "we thought it was unusual and weird and wrong, but when we first got there, the example was already set. That's what we saw. I mean, it was okay."[586] As the soldiers became more and more numb to the torture, an environment was being cultivated where such actions

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[582] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 3:00.
[583] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. 16:00-17:00.
[584] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 20:30.
[585] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 9:00.
[586] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 10:00.

were acceptable. Ken also noted that it was clear to him that none of the soldiers ultimately thought that their actions were morally suspect. "It's not like they were trying to hide anything, and that's what stands out to me," he said. "If you're doing something wrong, dead wrong, you're going to try to hide it."[587] Further, even when people who were uneasy with the actions reported them, they were assured it was okay. Ken says that he told his supervising Lieutenant that "weird things" were happening over at the hard site and was instructed to "stay out of MI's way and let them do their job."[588] Several weeks after Ken reports the actions to his superiors, and after nearly all of the Abu Ghraib photographs had been taken, Graner receives a special commendation from his superiors and is told that he is providing them good information that will assist them in winning the war in Iraq. As Ambuhl reports, that was confirmation of the actions and solidified in the soldier's minds that they were doing the right thing.

According to *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, these commendations and unofficial orders only served to further limit the agency of the soldiers themselves. Not only could the soldiers not disobey a direct order, they felt they couldn't even question them directly. Ken relates a story of the conversation he had with Sergeant Charles Graner.[589] According to Ken, Graner told him, "MI [Military Intelligence] and OGA [Other Government Agencies, e.g. the Central Intelligence Agency] are making me do things I

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[587] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 29:00. Ken also noted the impact of permissiveness regarding torture. Ostensibly, the logic of torture is that it provides information necessary for the war. He witnessed several occasions, however, where torture was being used as punishment for things that were connected only to prisoner behavior inside of the prison and not connected to the ongoing war effort. This suggests that once the line of torture has been crossed, it is seemingly impossible to re-draw borders for behavior.

[588] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 31:00. Ken tells the same story at the 53:30 mark in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. That time, he reports being told that he's "not even supposed to be over there. … That's not even your job over there. You need to stay away from the hard site."

[589] Of the punishments issued, Graner's was by far the most severe. Tagged as the person who had spearheaded the "abuse," Graner received a 10-year prison sentence. As such, he is not interviewed in any of the films, but is spoken for by others, including his wife, Megan Ambuhl. The two were married after they returned from Iraq.

feel are morally and ethically wrong." When Ken tells him not to do them, Graner replies, "I don't have a choice."[590] Ambuhl said, "I didn't feel like it was my place to question anybody" and compared it to going to the dentist – it was something you had to do, even if you didn't want to. Over time, the torture becomes so commonplace that the horror fades into the background. Javal said you learn to block it out while Harman said you become numb to it, which feeds back into the routine.[591]

Unlike the soldiers, who were framed by the Testimonial films as products of their scene, there is a definable move to action taken by the administration in which the motives are presented as premeditated and clear. In *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib,* John Yoo, from the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel, remembers that the administration came to them to determine what rights were afforded to the "enemy combatants." Noting that they neither signed the Geneva Convention, nor followed the "rules of warfare," the Department of Justice determined that they were not considered prisoners of war. Further, because treaties like the Geneva Convention failed to define words like "severe" (severe physical pain and suffering is a considered a violation of international law), it was up to the executive to do so.[592] This was the impetus for the now infamous memo that defined torture as being equal to organ failure and death. According to Albert Mora, the general counsel for the Department of the Navy, the administration opposed torture, but defined it so narrowly that even the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein at Abu Ghraib would almost certainly have been allowed.[593] The dismissal of international law as outlined by the Geneva Convention and

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[590] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 41:00. After he relates this story, Ken provides his theorizations of why the violence escalated. He says that over time, as someone is given more and more power, he or she begins to like it. S/he doesn't want to give up the power, Ken says, and in the attempt to hold on, things go too far.
[591] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 44:00.
[592] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 6:00.
[593] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 10:30.

the United Nations Convention on Torture threatened the stability of what Rear Admiral John Hutson, Judge Advocate General for the U.S. Navy, calls "civilized war." War, he explains, is always on the verge of spinning out of control and the only way to maintain some element of stability is to have very clear rules and standards. When those rules are dismissed, or even when they become fuzzy, he contends, "you're in unlimited warfare."[594] Although direct orders to torture were seemingly never given, several memoranda were issued that constituted a "wink and a nod" to do what was necessary to get information from the prisoners. General Miller said "you have to treat the prisoners like dogs," and, according to General Alfred McCoy, the commander of all U.S. forces in Iraq, General Ricardo Sanchez had "issued a memorandum for extreme techniques [to be used at Abu Ghraib]. Techniques that would seem to put the United States in violation of international law."[595]

It is this "wink and a nod" that the Testimonial films devote a considerable amount of time to. For the administration, the "bad apple" defense is supported by the lack of a direct order to torture, putting the responsibility directly on the soldiers themselves. *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* uses testimony from two experts who use the leaked photographs themselves to argue against the "bad apple" defense. Scott Horton, a human rights attorney, says that the administration is engaging in "conscious disinformation" and claims there is "zero chance" that the soldiers came up with the techniques that were used on their own. He notes that the tactics employed followed "very precisely described techniques" that were developed first at Guantanamo Bay for "the Global War on Terror" and then taken by General Miller to be "used at Abu Ghraib."[596] Mark Danner agrees,

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[594] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 8:00.
[595] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 34:00.
[596] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 69:00.

and notes that the pictures illustrate practices that have been used by military interrogators since the Vietnam War. The Gilligan picture in particular, he notes, depict a technique developed by the Brazilian military and untrained prison guards would not even be aware of it.[597]

There is also a hint that this lack of a direct order was part of the long-term plan and instrumental in the subsequent cover-up. Amidst concerns about prisoner treatment in Guantanamo Bay, in January of 2002, Rumsfeld said that there was not a "single scrap of any kind of information that suggests that anyone has been treated anything other than humanely." For his part, General Miller assured the public that "everything we do inside [Guantanamo is something] America can be proud of."[598] Although at the time that these comments were made the United States had not even taken over operations at Abu Ghraib, the connection between Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib via General Miller come 2003 must have been apparent to at least some in the Defense Department. If so, it would make strategic sense to have a high ranking military official be able to assure a questioning media and a concerned public that interrogations at Abu Ghraib were conducted within the requirements of International Law. Karpinski said that she had personally witnessed an interrogation at Abu Ghraib that was textbook in every way, but wondered if she had been brought in for the sole purpose of being able to make that claim. In support of her suspicions, Specialist Jeffrey Frost revealed that the soldiers would put on "a dog and pony show" whenever officials like Karpinski would tour the facilities. Everyone would be "treated well" while they were there, Frost said, but, after the officials left, it was a return to business as usual.

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[597] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 69:30.
[598] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 29:00.

Standard Operating Procedure offers a similar story. After U.S. soldiers take control of Abu Ghraib, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld paid a visit to the prison, toured the torture chambers and hanging rooms set up by Hussein, and then canceled the rest of his tour to immediately return to Washington. The next day, Rumsfeld placed "the guru of interrogation," General Geoffrey Miller, in charge of the daily operations at Abu Ghraib. According to Karpinski, he was sent "to Gitmoize the operation" and began contracting private "interrogators and military people that had experience in Afghanistan or Guantanamo Bay."[599] After Miller's visit, the military police were taken from Karpinski and put under the control of Military Intelligence; they were no longer mere prison guards, but now were instructed to "soften the prisoners up" prior to interrogation. According to Javal, "we got promoted from babysitters to condition setters. We got implemented into the plan."[600] Most of the soldiers said they were instructed by the OGAs engage in humiliation techniques and ensure the prisoners were subjected to sleep deprivation and disorientation practices. According to Specialist Jeremy Sivits, Graner's actions were the direct result of following orders from his superiors. In reference to the photograph of the pyramid of prisoners, Sivits says Graner was simply "doing what he was told. That's why he was doing it."[601] England, seemingly upset at being accused of wrongdoing, says, "We didn't kill them. We didn't cut their heads off. … We just did what we were told – to soften them up for interrogation. And we were told to do anything short of killing them."[602] These "softening up" procedures, however, began to become more and more severe. Javal reveals that other agencies, like the CIA, would instruct the soldiers to pretend that certain detainees were never delivered to them and to

[599] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 4:30.
[600] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 37:00.
[601] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 70:00.
[602] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 39:00.

not log their names in the prisoner ledger. "That's when things changed," Javal said as he described how the CIA would engage in waterboarding of "high profile" prisoners. "For hours and hours and hours, all you would hear was screaming and banging," Javal said.[603] It was this change in interrogation techniques that would lead to the first verifiable death at Abu Ghraib and open the door to our discussion of the second theme – the missing body.

According to *Standard Operating Procedure,* in November of 2003, the CIA brought a non-logged, high value prisoner (called a "ghost detainee") to Abu Ghraib for interrogation. According to Sergeant Tony Diaz, the prisoner was brought into the prison hooded and shackled, and was taken directly to the showers where he was waterboarded.[604] After the prisoner was tortured for an indeterminate amount of time, Specialist Jeffrey Frost was asked by a CIA official to help get a prisoner who was "playing possum" into a stress position. Frost recalls that he had a great deal of difficulty with the task because the prisoner was not responsive. The hood was taken off of the prisoner and it was discovered that he had died during the session. The CIA was concerned that the body would be discovered during a coming International Red Cross inspection and decided to store the body in an empty cell.[605] Although the death and the location of the body were supposed to remain secret, many of the soldiers were informed and several of them went to see it. During the viewing, Harman removed the bandages that covered the body's eyes and Graner instructed her to pose with the body so that he could take a picture.[606] In a letter home, dated November 5, 2003, Harman described it as

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[603] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 51:00.
[604] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 54:00.
[605] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 55:30.
[606] This picture is one of the more infamous of the Abu Ghraib photographs. It shows an unzipped body bag and Harman leaning down near the head of the corpse with a large smile and a "thumbs up."

"a crazy day."[607] The CIA solution was to pretend as though the man was still alive. They dressed him in an orange jump suit, laid a blanket over him, put an IV in his arm, and carried him out of the prison on a stretcher. The "ghost detainee" had now become almost a literal ghost, a missing body never to be recovered. As Javal summarized: "the guy died, they put him in a body bag, threw him on a gurney, [and] he was gone. [We were told] go about your business. Keep working. [He] disappeared, dissolved into thin air."[608]

Further, in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, the theme of the missing body often manifests itself in the form of the titular "ghost" or a feeling of haunting.[609] The haunting motif establishes itself early in the scenic representation of Abu Ghraib. Provance said,

> The place was just so dark and you knew the history. You felt like it was a haunted place. At nighttime, there were certain hallways you wouldn't want to go down by yourself because you're afraid there might be a ghost or something and you knew that if something was there, it was really pissed off.[610]

For many of the soldiers, the ghosts and haunting weren't literal, but derived from the horrifying history of the prison. Javal asked, "Do you know how many lost souls are walking around here?"[611] While there are visual suggestions of haunting and ghosts in both films, they are explicitly represented in *Standard Operating Procedure*. Throughout the film, Morris inserts images of ghosts walking through the halls and going about their lives in Abu Ghraib, all backed by ominous and frightening music. During one of these sequences, Harmon reads from a letter she sent home in October: "I have a bad feeling

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[607] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 60:00.
[608] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 63:00.
[609] As further evidence that the filmic representations of Abu Ghraib have a rhetorical impact, Provance used movie references to describe the prison, calling it "*Apocalypse Now* meets *The Shining*." *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 18:00.
[610] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 17:30.
[611] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 16:30.

about this place. … There is a chamber where these men were hung. I'm not sure about ghosts, but it sure is freaky."[612]

Another way in which the missing body theme emerges in these films is in how the pictures themselves are framed. In the Testimonial films, the Abu Ghraib photographs sit at an interesting, almost paradoxical, intersection within the attributive frame in that they exist both as traumatic spectacle and as limited vision. Looking first at the traumatic spectacle, *Standard Operating Procedure* shows that, in many cases, the photographed torture existed only as spectacle for the immediate witnesses and the secondary picture audience. For the immediate witnesses (who watched the beating of prisoners that took place outside of the interrogation rooms), Krol explained that, "it was never an interrogation. It was just for show, I believe. To show the spectators this would be done to anybody who breaks the rules."[613] As for the secondary audience, there were two: the intended secondary audience and the unintended secondary audience.[614] For the intended secondary audience, many of the pictured scenes were theatrically staged and existed only to be photographed. Speaking about the Gus photograph (where England held a leash tied around a prisoner's neck), England insists that Graner "never would have had me standing next to Gus if the camera wasn't there."[615] These pictures were then copied

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[612] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 6:30.

[613] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 32:00.

[614] I think it is unquestionable that the individuals who took these pictures certainly intended them to viewed by others, but not the public at large. Darby explained how Graner and others would make digital copies of the photographs and share them throughout the brigade, which illustrates intent to share within an intended audience. Krol, however, claims that he didn't even know the photographs existed until the investigation. He says that were big signs everywhere that said "no photography. And besides," he continued, "photographing something like that is just stupid." *Standard Operating Procedure*, 34:00. This seems to suggest that the military didn't want pictorial evidence of what was happening inside Abu Ghraib (hence the "no photography" signs) and that some of the soldiers, at least in hindsight, recognized the potential impact from such indiscretion. The potential exception to this statement is with Harman, who claims (and some of her letters home seem to support her claim) that she was taking pictures to document the abuse and act as a whistleblower herself.

[615] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 16:00.

and disseminated to anyone who requested a copy as a souvenir to commemorate their time in Abu Ghraib. For the unintended secondary audience, however, the pictures are what sparked the outrage. As Javal explained, there would be no "shock the world scandal if there wasn't [sic] any photographs."[616] And it is true that it was the world that was shocked, not just the United States, as these pictures transcended language and literacy barriers to "define the United States" as the "principle expositor of torture."[617] As evidence, *Standard Operating Procedure* lets Horton make this claim juxtaposed over footage of a protest in the Middle East in which a group of women carry a banner featuring the Gus photograph and a caption that reads, "USA – Pictures Talk."

In *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib,* the focus is almost exclusively on the administration response, which is depicted as primarily concerned with the public release of the photographs. When the pictures were turned in by Darby, the first response from the military was to establish an "amnesty box" and issue an assurance that any information turned in to this box would not be used in a criminal prosecution against the person who turned it in. This January 2004 assurance, however, was met with fear among the soldiers, Karpinski said. Javal agreed and noted that immediately after the establishment of the amnesty box, many began erasing hard drives and physically breaking discs for fear that they might be prosecuted.[618]

Ghosts of Abu Ghraib attempts to bolster the accusation that the administration was hoping to cover itself by using footage of administration officials appearing to be uncooperative and evasive during the Senate investigations. When Rumsfeld is asked by

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[616] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 72:00. This sentiment is reiterated by Harman in one of her letters home. She notes that people can refuse to believe a story you might tell but, if you have pictures, you "have proof and you can't deny it." *Standard Operating Procedure*, 11:00. This is the same letter that gives credence to her claim that she was taking pictures to gather evidence against the torture.
[617] Scott Horton, *Standard Operating Procedure*, 72:30.
[618] *Ghostst of Abu Ghraib*, 65:00.

Senator John McCain (himself a victim of torture in Vietnam) who was involved in the interrogations, what orders were given, and what the chain-of-command was, Rumsfeld is told by the general accompanying him that "we did not bring [that information]." Rumsfeld looks saddened and says, "Oh my, it was all prepared." The general replies with, "yes, 'oh my' is right. It was indeed [prepared]."[619] In this case, the film makes the administration look as though they are hoping to avoid providing information by hiding behind a "golly gee, shucks" attitude. The films go on to suggest that these internal investigations failed to look up the chain-of-command by the very nature of the attributive frame, that the desire to not see the spectacle denied the investigations access to those responsible. Huston argues that there were too many investigations done, each one clouding the conclusions of another, but none of them provided a comprehensive look at the entire event. Darby claims that Abu Ghraib was a great example of "bureaucratic virtuosity in handling a scandal." For him, there is a "long chain" that leads from the soldiers "back to the White House," but "none of these reports looked at the whole chain-of-command."[620] Further, according to Ken, the Abu Ghraib pictures don't truly show the horrifying reality of what happened at the prison. The pictures that were released, while arguably torture, only showed the "softening up" procedures, but there was no photographic evidence of the true torture that took place in the interrogation cells. For Ken, the interrogations were unquestionably torture, but the only "evidence" was the picture of Harman with the corpse that was smuggled out by the CIA.[621]

Although the pictures acted as a traumatic spectacle for many Americans, many of the soldiers are quick to point out that they are equally representative of limited vision.

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[619] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 70:00.
[620] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 71:00.
[621] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 55:00.

In *Standard Operating Procedure,* Army Special Agent Brent Pack explains, "The pictures spoke a thousand words, but unless you know what day and time that we're talking [about], you wouldn't know what the story was." He insists that all pictures have an inherent truth, but can be interpreted differently by those who view them and "you can put any kind of meaning to it, but you are [only] seeing what happened at that snapshot in time."[622] Ambuhl expands on this thought and argues that, "a picture only shows you a fraction of a second. You don't see forward, you don't see backward, and you don't see outside the frame."[623] The two examples the film uses to solidify this point are two of the most infamous pictures from Abu Ghraib: Gilligan and Gus. According to several of the soldiers, Gilligan was let down from the box after the photograph was taken and he was one of the soldiers' favorite prisoners in Abu Ghraib. Harman claims that she knew him to be an innocent man and that he was very helpful, always willing to do chores to prove his innocence, while Ambuhl claimed that he was a "pretty decent" guy.[624] In Gus' case, England insists that the slack visible in the leash proves she didn't drag him from his cell (as the picture is often described), but was handed the leash after the prisoner crawled out of his own accord. Ambuhl tells the same story and adds that after the picture was taken, Gus stood up on his own.[625]

For many of the soldiers, it wasn't that the pictures absolved them of wrongdoing, but their integration into the larger narrative served to distort the true horror and provide cover to the administration. According to Javal, the pictures were used to tell the story

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[622] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 17:00.
[623] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 79:30. In this sequence, Ambuhl is referring to photographs that show a trail of blood leading down a hallway. According to her (and others), an Iraqi prison guard had smuggled a pistol into the prison and tried to kill some of the American guards. He was shot and dragged away, which left the trail of blood that appears in the picture. Ambuhl says, "It doesn't appear when you just see a picture that that was what happened. Your imagination can run wild when you just see blood."
[624] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 42:30.
[625] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 13:00.

that the administration wanted to tell. He tells the story of how he first learned how he was to become associated with the torture at Abu Ghraib. Javal says that he was watching the nightly news when he saw a shocking picture of himself following the pictures from Abu Ghraib. He couldn't figure out where the picture they were using came from, so he investigated and found that it was a photograph acquired from his old high school where he had been on the track team. The picture they used was one where his face was contorted because he was in mid-jump over a hurdle at a local track meet, but the news story had cropped the photo to just show his face. "They made me look like this mean-ass guy," Javal said. "They're showing naked people in a pyramid and then they show a picture of me." And even though Javal was not present when Graner had the "pyramid" picture taken, many believed Javal had been involved because of the way the news visually framed the story.[626]

Given the notable differences between the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films over the framing of the American Subject, the agency involved in the move to action, and the horror wrapped up in the missing body, what a frame genre analysis of the Testimonial films reveals is the emergence of a counter-narrative to the Nine-Eleven films / master narrative. Even though these films are structurally different in that they are documentaries, the thematic telling of their narrative is similar to what we've already seen, first in the mainstream news media and then in the romanticized (re)telling through the Nine-Eleven films. There is a centrality to the importance of information, in terms of both rules of engagement and the operational success of the war effort. Further, the films

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[626] *Standard Operating Procedure*, 100:00. As an interesting point, Lucien Taylor draws some interesting connections between photography, documentary filmmaking, and "real" life. She argues that photographs are to film what film is to life; both photographs and film necessarily leave something out, but film can tell the stories that photographs alone cannot. She writes that documentary films in particular can "create a shared field of consciousness linking subjects, filmmaker, and spectators" together to create a common reality. Lucien Taylor, "Introduction," in *Transcultural Cinema*, ed. Lucien Taylor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 12.

spend a fair amount of time in their attempts to make the soldiers appear more sympathetic and paint them as good people put in a bad situation by the administration. It is this "bad situation" that acts as the move to action theme for the film – agency is removed from the soldier and placed on the administration as that which was responsible to the event itself. The missing body theme is also present in both a literal form (the missing body of tortured prisoners) and as an analogy (the specter of haunting). These similarities suggest that the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films are part of the same national conversation – that is that they comprise a cultural discourse in the social body of the United States – and work together dialectically. It is to that dialectic that I now turn.

MASTER NARRATIVE AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE DIALECTICS

According to Richard Bauman, in critical readings, literary theorists tend to look from a given "text" outward to society, while anthropologists look from society back to a text; for his part, Bauman focuses on the perfomative aspect of communication "above and beyond its referential content."[627] Owing to longstanding protocols of "close reading," noticeably missing from Bauman's explanation is the interaction between texts – the dialectic created between master and counter-narratives that help mold a culture. For Jerome S. Bruner, a culture's "vitality lies in its dialectic, in its need to come to terms with contending views, clashing narratives."[628] For many scholars, it is a "fact that

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[627] Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

[628] Jerome S. Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 2002), 91. In this vein, John Lucaites and Celeste Condit looked at the dialectic between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X that established a vocabulary of equality in America. They concluded that such dialectic is "a theory of social and political power that may help us to unite our understanding of social actors and material forces, and to undermine the potentially oppressive contradictions implicit in our ideological commitments." John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit, "Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal and Counter Cultural Rhetorics in the Martyred Black Vision," *Communication Monographs* 57 (1990): 21. EBSCOhost (9942128). In their study of disability narratives and counter-narratives, Lynn

narratives must compete with one another" creating a "narrative ground [that] is a finite mass."[629] According to Walter Fisher, "the world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation."[630] This back-and-forth recreation of life stories creates a dialectic between master and counter-narrative.

Once calcified in the public memory, a master narrative becomes "truth" – a kind of accepted norm. The Nine-Eleven films are a cinematic representation of the "truth" to the Nine-Eleven master narrative, acting as an artistic memorial to the event and a frame for reflection, possibly mourning. For film critic Cristina Barone, *World Trade Center* was "framed as a kind of mourning. Black title screens with white script memorialize officers who lost their lives and serve as bookends to the story."[631] Oliver Stone himself noted that he wanted "people to remember that day as it was. I had a feeling that we should memorialize some of this. This was a story that was begging to be told."[632] Because this memorialization was part of the master narrative, however, the story "begging to be told" was to be *consumed* apolitically.[633] Actor Jon Bernthal (who played

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Harter, Jennifer Scott, David Novak, Mark Leeman, and Jerimiah Morris argued that the negotiation between master and counter-narratives created a dialectic between "interwoven social forces – market patterns, institutional practices, lived experiences of individuals – that intertwine to form the social milieu in which performances unfold." Lynn A. Harter et al., "Freedom Through Flight: Performing a Counter-Narrative of Disability," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 34 (2006): 5. EBSCOhost (19114471).

[629] Janette Kenner Muir and Marilyn Young, "Evidence, Credibility and Narrative Structures: The Case of Anita Hill," in *Outsiders Looking In: Communication Perspective on the Hill/Thomas Hearings*, ed. Paul Siegel (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1996), 60.

[630] Fisher, "Fisher, "Narration," ", 8.

[631] Cristina Barone, "Stone Evokes Strong Emotion with 'World Trade Center'," *University Wire*, September 7, 2006, Film Review section. LexisNexis.

[632] Oliver Stone, "A Softening Stone? Controversial Oliver Stone Finds Patriotism in 9/11 Story," quoted in Jeff Strickler, *The Calgary Herald*, August 7, 2006, Entertainment section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[633] Of course there is a politics to these films, but it is their status as part of the master narrative that allows them to be political in a social blind spot where they appear to be "above" politics. Curiously, for Slavoj Žižek, it is the *absence* of an overt political message that is the political message. *World Trade Center*, for example, could have been told as if the towers had collapsed because of an earthquake, he argues, but not as a "bombed high-rise building in Beirut" which would have been dismissed as "pro-Hizbullah terrorist propaganda." Slavoj Žižek, "On 9/11, New Yorkers Faced the Fire in the Minds of Men: Hollywood's Attempts to Mark the 2001 Attacks Ignore Their Political Context and the Return to History They

Dominick) said, “the movie managed to be really about the resolve of this city and this country, and there’s nothing political about it, and it really memorializes and honors these great heroes.”[634] There were similar responses to *United 93*.[635] Mike Amenti, who was in elementary school in 2001, said of the film: “We needed some way to memorialize the people who were on the plane, sacrificing their lives and saving countless others.”[636] For Lim, *United 93* is “eager to stress that the deaths were not in vain. It not only tells us we should never forget, but also illustrates how we should remember.”[637] Such memorialization efforts serve to smooth out the master narrative.[638]

Although master narratives are usually considered apolitical norms, challenges to the master narrative are often viewed as inherently political.[639] As a Nine-Eleven counter-narrative, the Testimonial films mark a traumatic remainder, or gap, in the master narrative.[640] At the end of both of the Testimonial films, the audience is left with the

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Symbolize," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2006, Comment and Debate section. LexisNexis. He concludes that, “the political message of [*World Trade Center* and *United 93*] resides in [the filmmakers’] abstention from delivering a direct political message.” Žižek, "On 9/11," LexisNexis.

634 Jon Bernthal, "Russ Mitchell Interviews Actor Jon Bernthal from 'The Class' and 'World Trade Center'," *The Early Show*, CBS News Transcripts (August 4, 2006).

635 In this case, *United 93* was literally part of a memorial effort as 10 percent of the film’s opening weekend grosses were donated to the “Families of Flight 93” national memorial. See "Studio Behind 'United 93' to Route Some Profits to Memorial," *The Houston Chronicle*, April 10, 2006, Star section. LexisNexis.

636 Mike Amenti, "Flight 93 Movie Relives Terror," quoted in Caitlin Cleary, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 29, 2006, Local section, Sooner edition. LexisNexis.

637 Dennis Lim, "A Flight To Remember," The Village Voice, April 11, 2006, accessed May 2, 2012, www.villagevoice.com/2006-04-11/film/a-flight-to-remember/2/, par. 6, 3.

638 Although these efforts to memorialize the events of September 11 do help to make the Nine-Eleven master narrative easier to consume, not all memorials function this way. For an in-depth discussion of efforts with varying degrees of rhetorical success, from Nine-Eleven to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS Quilt, see Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10 (2007). EBSCOhost (29968764).

639 Colette Daiute, "Trouble - In, Around, and Between Narratives," *Narrative Inquiry* 21 (2011). EBSCOhost (69872120).

640 Abu Ghraib, as a counter-narrative to the Nine-Eleven master narrative, was culturally traumatic in that it threatened the identity formation of the American Subject. According to Jeffrey Alexander, “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.” Alexander, "Toward a Theory," 1. For Giorgio Shani,

feeling that, after Abu Ghraib, neither the individuals involved nor the soul of the nation will ever be the same. For the soldiers, their time and actions in Abu Ghraib left them permanently changed. Javal says the person being interviewed for these films is a different man than the one who was deployed to Abu Ghraib. Ambuhl reflects personally and remarks that she "now [has] some regrets about what went on there," while Rivera places his experience is a larger social context. Analogizing Abu Ghraib with William Golding's book *Lord of the Flies*, Rivera says that an "animalistic, dark element in each of us [was] brought out. It's just a matter of 'are the elements right?'"[641] For Army Pack, the scandal permanently stains the reputation of the nation and the Abu Ghraib pictures serve to ensure that this will "be remembered as the one time [Americans] were not the heroes, we were not the saviors."[642] In contrast to Karpinski's punishment, the films remind the audience not only of the lack of accountability up the chain-of-command, but of the rewards that came with toeing the line.[643] In the closing moments of *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, Mora provides the ultimate lesson from the film: "If we adopt cruel treatment as some might want us to adopt [and] if we embrace torture as something that is expedient and necessary in the instance … we blur the distinction between ourselves and the terrorists."[644] Almost immediately following this is a voiceover by Dr.

"central to the concept of cultural trauma is the belief that our individual security relies not only our personal safety … but also on the dignity afforded by membership of a community which maintains its own distinct identity." Giorgio Shani, "The Memorialization of Ghallughara: Trauma, Nation and Diaspora," *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 6 (2010): 179. EBSCOhost (56040547).

641 *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 75:00.

642 *Standard Operating Procedure*, 96:00. Pack was a Special Agent in the Army Criminal Investigation Command, which is the internal Army division which deals with felonies and violation of military law and was the office Darby turned the photographs over to.

643 For example, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* notes that General Miller was promoted to Deputy Commanding General for Detainee Operations in Iraq and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal at the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes in 2006.

644 *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 73:00.

Milgram who summarizes his conclusions to the Yale "shock experiment." Milgram says,

> People do what they are told to do irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority. … One can only wonder what government, with its vastly greater authority and prestige, can command of its subjects.

The film then closes with a shot of President Bush, seemingly smirking as he signs a bill. Under the picture is the caption, "In October 2006, President Bush signed the Military Commissions Act, further eroding the rights of prisoners guaranteed by the Geneva Conventions."[645]

According to George Dionisopoulos, "to be successful, [a] political counter-narrative should contest as much of the original narrative as possible."[646] From within the frames outlined here, the Testimonial films work dialectically with the Nine-Eleven films to negotiate a vision of the world since September 2001. Between them, however, there seems to be little opportunity for one to work-through the horror of torture, which is not broached by the Nine-Eleven films and simply taken as an unfortunate given in the Testimonial films. There is no reference to torture or Abu Ghraib in the Nine-Eleven narrative and the accompanying films, and the Testimonial films provide a counter-narrative that refuses a direct engagement with the horror of torture in lieu of definitional debates and attempts to locate agency with the administration. In this sense, the Testimonial films are what Hilde Lindemann Nelson calls a counterstory, narratives "which root out the master narratives in the tissue of stories that constitute an oppressive identity and replace them with stories that depict the person as morally worthy."[647] The

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[645] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 75:00.
[646] George N. Dionisopoulos, "Incident on the Bay Hap River and the Guns of August: The 'Swift Boat Drama' and Counter-Narrative in the 2004 Election," review 57 (2009): 504. EBSCOhost.
[647] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 150.

counter-narrative, in this case, spends its energy absolving the soldiers of moral guilt, but leaves the horror of torture unexamined. According to Marouf Hasian and Robert Frank, "counter narratives always face possible domestication, subordination, and appropriation."[648] In the next chapter, I will continue my frame genre criticism with a series of films that, if nothing else, certainly engage the issue of torture directly – torture porn.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I performed a frame genre analysis of the Nine-Eleven films and found them to be consistent with the Nine-Eleven master narrative. I then performed a frame genre analysis of the Testimonial films and found that they offered a counter-narrative to the master narrative. For both the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films, there was a premium placed on information and framing who the heroes of the story were; the move to action and missing body themes were also present, but how they were framed within the films were different. In the Nine-Eleven films, action was consistently valorized and actions by governmental agents and individual citizens were to be preferred over passivity. In the Testimonial films, however, the move to action theme focused on who controlled agency in an effort to assess blame. The soldiers were denied agency in these films (ostensibly to absolve them of the torture) and agency was instead transferred either to the administration or to the scene itself. In terms of the missing body, the Nine-Eleven films framed this theme as a demand to recover the body and a fear that one might be forever lost. In the Testimonial films, the missing body is always points to an imbalance in the system. These two sets of films work together dialectically to negotiate

[648] Marouf Hasian and Robert E. Frank, "Rhetoric, History, and Collective Memory: Decoding the Goldhagen Debates," *Western Journal of Communication* 63 (1999): 103. EBSCOhost (1712582).

an understanding of the world after Nine-Eleven. In so doing, however, both sets of films side-step the horror of torture. It is to confronting that horror that I now turn.

Chapter 5

A Frame Genre Criticism of Torture Porn

In the previous chapter, I argued that the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films work together dialectically, but failed to provide an explanation to the trauma of torture as encapsulated by the Abu Ghraib scandal. What was often absent in that discussion was a direct engagement with the issue of torture as an experience.[649] In the dialectic between the master and counter-narrative, there is ample discussion of torture as a concept and torture as a political issue, but very little about the impact of torture on the body and mind of both the person tortured and the torturer. I suggest that the experience of torture is an issue taken up by the horror films of the time.

In this chapter, I analyze the so-called torture porn films and examine the potential for torture porn to act as a third-term in the dialectic between the master and counter-narrative, what I term a "narrative mediator," since "horror thrives above all as a narrative form."[650] To this end, I will first perform a frame genre criticism of Eli Roth's 2005 film *Hostel*, which is widely regarded as a (if not *the*) representative example of the torture porn genre. I chose *Hostel* as the film for extended analysis because it was one of the first in the genre and many believe "set the rules" for the patterns of what constitutes a torture porn film. I will then support that generic analysis with an examination of

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[649] I argue that the experience of torture is "often absent," because there is a graphic discussion of the experience of water-boarding specifically. To me, what is different between the discussion of water-boarding in the counter-narrative and the experience of torture in torture porn is that the counter-narrative uses the experience of torture to argue that there is a political impact to the United States' support of torture (e.g. a loss of international reputation), while torture porn simply opens the wound of torture and lets it fester.

[650] Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 181.

sixteen other torture porn films.[651] I conclude the chapter with an explanation of how the torture porn films function as rhetorical mediators in the dialectic between the Nine-Eleven master narrative and counter-narrative.

THE TORTURE PORN FILMS

According to Noël Carroll, the horror narrative "may be the crucial locus of our interest and pleasure," and, with torture porn in particular, this narrative structure helps bridge the gap between art-torture and the torture of the real world.[652] Just as the photographs of Abu Ghraib were a theatrical reality, the violent inspiration for *Hostel* was inspired from the reality of torture abroad. According to writer and director Eli Roth, he was directed to a web site by his friend Harry Knowles to find a business in Thailand where one could pay $10,000, be handed a loaded weapon and then enter a room where another human being was waiting to be killed. Allegedly, the company claimed the practice was legal because the victims gave themselves up willingly. Jeremy

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[651] The 16 films I analyzed were: *Captivity, The Devil's Rejects, Hostel, Hostel: Part II, High Tension, House of 1000 Corpses, Saw I-VI, The Strangers, Turistas, Vacancy,* and *Wolf Creek*. I also viewed the re-makes of *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* which most people consider torture porn, but my comments are not included here. I ultimately decided to leave them out of the final project because, although I believe there are connections to Nine-Eleven, the basic plots of these two re-makes follow the original films too closely to usefully inform this particular analysis.

[652] Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 179. Although many scholars have explored the notion of narrative in horror films bridging the gap to real world fears, there seems to be a gap in this literature with reference to Abu Ghraib specifically. For examples of essays that connect the real world to classic literary motifs, see Stacy Alaimo, "Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films," in *Beyond Naure Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, eds. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). For a discussion of "human vs. technology" and "uncanny anxieties," see Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). And for a specific analysis of the "enemy within" motif, D. N. Rodowick performs an engaging reading of *The Hills Have Eyes*. See D. N. Rodowick, "The Enemy Within: The Economy of Violence in 'The Hills Have Eyes'," in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004). There are, of course, many other examples; the point, however, is that the concept of horror films reflecting social fears is firmly rooted in the assumption that the narrative gestures towards the social events of the day. For example, in his analysis of *The Host* and *Cloverfield*, Homay King notes that they are both traditional "creature features," but they structure the narrative around a modern understanding of a nontemporal, or temporally disjointed, Internet presence that the audience can identify with. Homay King, "The Host versus Cloverfield," in *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*, eds. Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

Reynolds reports that the victims "supposedly were desolate, poverty-stricken people who had families starving to death. Sacrificing themselves was the only way for them to make enough money to help their loved ones survive."[653] Although this web site no longer exists and it is therefore impossible to substantiate Roth's story, the possibility of urban legend status is irrelevant to Roth. "Whether this place exists or not is not the point," he explains. "Somebody else thought up, realized, and conceptualized, that there's some guy out there, that's so bored with money and drugs. … They can't get off from going to a hooker or strip club or doing drugs. They're looking for that next level of thrill, and that, I said, was real."[654] It is this numbness to excess and the thought that, for some, the only remaining thrill in the world could be derived from experiencing pure abjection that prompted executive producer Quentin Tarantino to call the plot to *Hostel* "the sickest idea he had ever heard."[655]

Recognizing the film's potential to be a forerunner in a quickly emerging and evolving genre, *Hostel*'s distributor, Lions Gate Films, provided full studio support for publicity and distribution. Both Roth and Tarantino traveled to Spain's Sitges Film Fest to kick off a European tour in support of the film, an "anomaly when it comes to horror [films], which usually don't have sexy names to tout."[656] Jason Middleton called the film "emblematic" of the genre and "a form of cultural problem solving" surrounding the war on terror debate.[657] In fact, it was in his review of *Hostel* that David Edelstein first

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[653] Jeremy Reynolds, "Roth Seeking to Terrify, Disgust with Gore-Fest 'Hostel'," *Daily Toreador*, January 4, 2006, Interview section. LexisNexis.
[654] Eli Roth, "Eli Roth Checks Into Dark Places for 'Hostel'," quoted in Daniel Fienberg, *zaptoit*, January 4, 2006, Entertainment News section. LexisNexis (K7138). *Ellipses in original.*
[655] Steve Persall, "Gore and Grandma," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 5, 2006, Weekend section, 13W. LexisNexis.
[656] Nicole LaPorte, "Horror Hits Have High Hopes," *Variety*, December 26, 2005, 9. LexisNexis.
[657] Jason Middleton, "The Subject of Torture: Regarding the Pain of Americans in Hostel," *Cinema Journal* 49 (2010): 1. EBSCOhost.

coined the term "torture porn."[658] Opening in nearly 2,200 theaters on September 17, 2005, *Hostel* was the top grossing film of the weekend and was listed in the top-10 grossing films for nearly the entire first month of its release. The film ultimately brought in over $80 million in box office revenue and nearly $30 million in the first two months of DVD sales and rentals.[659] To date, *Hostel* stands as one of the most financially successful and culturally discussed exemplars of the torture porn genre.[660]

By way of synopsis, I will describe the generic structure of a torture porn film that is almost ubiquitous through 16 films that comprise the genre's core texts. Act I introduces us to the protagonists, who are presented as young, adventurous, and often upwardly mobile. The inciting incident occurs when these protagonists find themselves in a location that is "culturally different" (often read as "culturally backwards"), which often manifests itself as either a foreign nation or rural part of the United States.[661] In Act II, there is some kind of attack on the protagonists and they spend most of the film attempting to escape from their torturous situation. The protagonists often face three obstacles during this attempted escape: authorities that are unable or unwilling to help, a demonstrated obliviousness as to what's happening around them, and an inversion of the cultural norms that, up to this point, have served to help the protagonists. Act III usually begins with a separation of the protagonists and contains a climax where one of the

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[658] Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn," par.

[659] "Box Office Mojo - Hostel," accessed July 21, 2011, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=hostel.htm

[660] *Hostel*, DVD, directed by Eli Roth (2005; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006).

[661] In the *Saw* series, the build-up of interacting with the locals is skipped entirely and the protagonists just wake up in an entirely foreign location and situation. For example, in *Saw V*, Seth wakes up strapped to a table with a razor pendulum threatening to cut him in half. Although this is admittedly more "foreign" than a hash bar in Amsterdam, it functions the same way for the audience – we put ourselves in the uncomfortable situation of the character and this identification will ultimately force the audience into confrontation with questions such as the morality of torture. *Saw* simply propels the audience towards those questions more quickly than the other examples. *Saw V*, DVD, directed by David Hackl (Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2008).

protagonists is provided the opportunity to do harm to the antagonist(s), ending with an uneasy calm only that hints at future horror.[662]

In *Hostel*, Act I introduces us to two Americans, Josh (Derek Richardson) and Paxton (played by Jay Hernandez), and one Icelander, Oli (played by Eythor Gudjonsson) – college-aged tourists who are backpacking through Europe and currently in Amsterdam. The inciting incident occurs when the men return to the youth hostel in which they are staying and are told that they can find some wild times if they head East to Slovakia. The men postpone their scheduled trip to Spain and take the next train to Slovakia, where they check into a local hostel and go out for a wild night on the town. The first plot point occurs the next morning when Josh and Paxton cannot find Oli and are told by a young Japanese tourist (played by Jennifer Lim) that her friend has gone missing as well. In Act II, Josh and Paxton go on the hunt for Oli and more fun, which represents the physical obstacle of being trapped. There are also logistical problems as neither the police nor the hostel workers are any help. The midpoint of the film comes when Josh is drugged and taken to the factory, leaving Paxton alone. The obstacles now shift to a focus on the missing bodies of Josh, Oli, and the other Japanese tourist as Paxton tries desperately to find them. Ultimately, Paxton is taken to the factory, where

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[662] The only film that doesn't really follow this structure is *Vacancy*. While they are urbanites that find themselves in a rural setting and victims of a local torture ring, both of the protagonists survive the situation and never choose to torture their captors. Interestingly, the reported budget for *Vacancy* was $19 million and starred romantic comedy favorite Kate Beckinsale and beloved comedic actor Luke Wilson. This is in contrast to the reported budgets of $1.2 million for *Saw* and $4.5 million for *Hostel*, and starred either relatively unknown actors or stars whose careers had fell into a slump. As a result, *Vacancy* seems relatively polished and tame when comparison to other examples in the genre. Critics noted the differences as well. Scott Bowles notes that *Vacancy* "relies more on apprehension and suspense than torture chambers." Scott Bowles, "'Vacancy' Will Keep You in Bloody Suspense," *USA Today*, April 20, 2007, Life section. Contrasting it with our exemplar, Elizabeth Weitzman writes, "It's not as gleefully sadistic as, say, *Hostel*." Elizabeth Weitzman, "Scaring Up a Room at Motel Hell," *New York Daily News*, April 20, 2007, Entertainment section. Even as an outlier, however, *Vacancy* is still more similar to the other 15 films examined than it is different, suggesting that torture porn should be considered a genre in its structural format.

he experiences the horror of the reappearing body and flees for his life. Just as he's about get away, however, Paxton hears the screams of a woman and decides to risk his own personal safety to save her (the second plot point). In the climax, Paxton saves the Japanese tourist and flees with her. During their escape, Paxton discovers that many of the people he trusted in the film were instrumental in his friends' torture and deaths (and his torture as well). Armed with this knowledge, he turns vengeful and brutally murders many of them before boarding a train back to Western Europe.

Torture Porn: The descriptive frame

In torture porn films, the descriptive frame focuses on who we are as U.S. citizens and the centrality of information. Turning first to the question of who we are, torture porn films seem to situate the characters as generally good people with common faults. Of the 16 films examined for this project, 14 of them begin with protagonists who were average people who find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. In virtually every case, one or more of the protagonists attempted to be a "good person" in the new environment, but often behaved in off-putting ways (sometimes unconsciously). In films set in foreign nations (e.g. *Turistas* and *Wolf Creek*) at least one of the protagonists tried to avoid being the "ugly American" and act in a culturally sensitive manner. For example, in *Turistas*, the main protagonist Alex (played by Josh Duhamel) wants to be the "good American" who engages in traditional tourist activities, while Bea (played by Olivia Wilde) and Amy (played by Beau Garrett) are more interested in cutting loose and giving over to their base desires.[663] In the films that were set in the United States (e.g. *House of 1000 Corpses* and *The Strangers*), the protagonists were still positioned as "outsiders," but usually as city dwellers that found themselves in a rural part of the country. For example, in *House of*

[663] *Turistas*, DVD, directed by John Stockwell (2006; West Hollywood, CA: Stone Village Pictures, 2007).

1000 Corpses, the four protagonists are on a cross-country road trip in hopes of writing a book on offbeat roadside attractions. When they take advantage of their "last chance for gas" in a rural area, the group encounters Captain Spaulding (played by Sid Haig) and his "Museum of Monsters and Madmen."[664] The "ugly American" motif is replaced by the "ugly Urbanite," but the function is the same: the city dweller leaves on vacation to the country to either enjoy the oddities and cultural differences of the backwoods hill people (as in *House of 1000 Corpses*) or to escape the constant pressures of a "civilized" city life (as in *The Strangers*). In all of the films, the story is set in motion by an attack, often seen as unprovoked by the victims. For example, in *The Strangers*, when asked why the attackers were torturing Kristen (played by Liv Tyler) and James (played by Scott Speedman), the answer is simple: "because you were home."[665]

In *Hostel*, there is a continual fear of being the quintessential "ugly American tourist," traipsing around Europe and complaining that the money looks funny. Throughout the opening portions of Act I, Josh and Paxton meet this challenge with varying degrees of success. At the 3:30 minute-mark, the men go to a hash bar in Amsterdam to find it filled with stereotypical young Americans who travelled to Amsterdam to take advantage of legal drugs and prostitution. Director Eli Roth even makes an appearance in this sequence as an American dressed head to toe in Boston Red Sox attire and who laughs at his friend's inability to smoke out of a bong correctly. Disgusted, Josh looks around and asks, "Are there any Dutch people in Amsterdam?" Moments later, when Josh actually does interact with some Dutch people in a local nightclub, he starts a fight and gets thrown out of the club by a hulking bouncer. Mad at

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[664] *House of 1000 Corpses*, DVD, directed by Rob Zombie (2003; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2007).
[665] *The Strangers*, DVD, directed by Bryan Bertino (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2008).

the way he's being manhandled, Josh screams at the bouncer, "Hey, I'm an American! I got rights!"[666] Josh's friend, Paxton, then admonishes the people waiting in line to enter the club that there is nothing but "wall-to-wall faggots in there."

In the last part of Act I, when the men arrive in Slovakia at the 16 minute-mark, American audiences are reminded not just who we are, but who we are not. Although certainly foreign to Paxton, Josh, and Oli, Amsterdam was a safe place where one could indulge their desires and the worst that might happen is to get punched by a bouncer who was just doing his job. The framing of Slovakia, however, is not just foreign, but a feeling of radical alterity. This is not a place for the casual tourist or the college-aged fantasy chaser, but a physical manifestation of one's sickest fetish because, in Slovakia, "you can pay to do anything. … *Anything*."[667] We see this feeling of displacement on the faces of the men as they step off the train and stand, speechless, on the platform. The music is ominous and the audience wonders for a moment if the men will turn around, get back on the train, and head for Barcelona. After a few moments of tense silence, however, Paxton puffs his chest out and plows forward, Josh and Oli following in his wake. As the men try to get themselves excited about this leg of their journey, signs that things have fundamentally changed continue to emerge. When they first enter the hostel in Slovakia at the 18:30 minute-mark, a group of locals sit and watch a dubbed version of Quentin Tarantino's 1994 hit *Pulp Fiction*.[668] Paxton eyes the television nervously and remarks, "How the fuck are we supposed to understand if there aren't subtitles?" This

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[666] This is an example of how Josh, who is presented as someone who tries to be culturally sensitive, cannot help but let the arrogance surrounding his nationality and national identity slip through. Another example is found at the 21 minute-mark, when he is aghast at being mistaken for a different nationality in the spa. When one of the women notes that Josh is not Icelandic like his companion Oli, Josh responds with, "Fuck no, I'm American."

[667] This is what the men are told on the train to Slovakia by the Dutch businessman at the 14 minute-mark.

[668] There are different ways one might read the inclusion of *Pulp Fiction* in this sequence. For some, it might be the mark of excessive violence. For others, it might be a product of Eli Roth's friendship with Tarantino and Tarantino's work as a producer for *Hostel*.

short transitional sequence between scenes (from exterior to interior), coming when it does, potentially carries tremendous weight for the audience. It appears at a time in the film when there is a shift in mood (from joy to trepidation) and is loaded with intertextual messages that the horror audience member will be able to decode.[669] Here, the radical Other consumes our culture, and the audience understands that soon the American body will be consumed as well.

Now that we have a better idea of how the films construct an identity of the U.S. citizen for the audience, let's turn to the place of information in the torture porn film. Like the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films, the descriptive frame of the torture porn film concerns itself with the centrality of information and access to what is happening. This manifests itself in most of the films as an obliviousness to what is happening around them.[670] This obliviousness squandered opportunities for escape in some cases and led to poor decisions in others. For example, in *Hostel*, Josh and Paxton's obliviousness kept

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[669] Intertextuality is important for both horror films and genre films. The audience understands that this film exists in a universe of other films and they have seen, and therefore expect, certain patterns to emerge. For example, when the killer first goes down in a slasher film, nobody in the audience expects that he is truly dead or that he'll stay down; they have been trained that he will soon sit up and resume the killing spree. Similarly, genre films rely on intertextual understandings because it is the constellation of similarities between films that make a genre. In this case, the literate horror fan understands the connection between the two (Quentin Tarantino directed *Pulp Fiction* and was the producer of *Hostel*) and, contrary to Paxton's assumption that we can't understand the film without subtitles, the scene from *Pulp Fiction* is one of the most famous sequences in the film: organized crime hit man Jules, played by Samuel L. Jackson, is quoting a bible verse to a group of men that he and his partner Vincent are about to execute. He turns toward the men and snarls, "I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers." *Pulp Fiction*, DVD, directed by Quentin Tarantino (1994; Burbank, CA: Miramax Home Entertainment, 1995).

[670] This theme was present in every film to some degree, but varied in intensity depending on the circumstances and the sequence in a franchise. For example, in *Vacancy*, the protagonists don't realize the danger they're in until they literally see it on the television. *Vacancy*, DVD, directed by Nimrod Antal (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007). In the *Saw* series, Jigsaw's victims accept the reality of their situation much quicker as the series progresses and the characters know the danger is immediately real. For example, see *Saw VI*, DVD, directed by Kevin Greutert (2009; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2010). In *High Tension*, this obliviousness is transferred to the audience as it isn't until the climax that the killer is revealed to actually be Marie. *High Tension*, DVD, directed by Alexandre Aja (2003; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Home Entertainment, 2006).

them from fleeing when Oli was first captured and killed, and, in *The Devil's Rejects*, Wendy's limited understanding of the danger led to her untimely demise when she was run over by a semi.[671] Further, in 12 of the films, there was an additional logistical obstacle in the form of the "unhelpful authority." In some cases, the authorities were unhelpful due to their own obliviousness, or general ineptitude. For example, in *House of 1000 Corpses*, Sheriff Huston is unable to save the protagonists because Otis murders him just as Huston discovers the bodies of the missing cheerleaders and understands the danger he's in.[672] In other cases, the authorities were unhelpful because they had a vested interest in the torture of the protagonists. For example, in *Saw IV*, Detective Hoffman, the police officer assigned to the Jigsaw murders case, is actually the one responsible for the killings.[673] In *Hostel*, there are multiple levels to the "unhelpful authority," from the hostel employees who act as cogs in the torture machine, to the police officers, who are ostensibly paid off to ignore the reports of missing tourists. This theme appears in all 16 of the films analyzed.

In addition to the "unhelpful authority," there is a willful misinformation in many of the films as well. For example, in *Hostel*, at the 19:30 minute-mark in *Hostel*, the men first check into their room in Slovakia and "catch" Svetlana and Natalia half-naked. The men apologize, but the women assure them that it's not a problem, and invite the guys to join them at the spa. It is from there that the men get to know the women well enough to "seduce" them later. This could be considered either misinformation (that the men "seduced" the women) or a willful obliviousness on the part of the protagonists, but in

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671 *The Devil's Rejects*, DVD, directed by Rob Zombie (Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2005).
672 *House of 1000 Corpses*.
673 *Saw IV*, DVD, directed by Darren Lynn Bousman (2007; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2008).

either event, the true information revealed later forces a confrontation. At the 47 minute-mark, Paxton represents a glitch in the system when he passes out in the back room of the nightclub as opposed to returning to the hostel. As a result, the factory believes him to be gone and when he returns to the hostel, he is treated as a new guest. Paxton goes up to his room and "catches" two new women who are half-naked. They assure him that it's not a problem and invite Paxton to join them at the spa. This repetition destroys the façade of the factory's game, revealing the inner workings of the industry. This forces Paxton to confront the reality of a systemic horror. At the 53 minute-mark, when Paxton is taken to the factory, the audience learns that this operation is not just a handful of people, but an entire organized network. The spectator also learns that the local government and police force are not inept, but are aware of what occurs and active participants in the torture-industry. Earlier in Act II, Paxton had been stymied by what the audience believed to be a logistical barrier manifest in an inept police force. Now, at the end of Act II, the audience learns the police are active participants in the torture-industry, paid to both turn a blind eye to the murders and even help the factory track down escaped victims.

What emerges from this analysis is that, although all of the films focus on information, there is a marked difference in how information is dealt with in torture porn. Unlike the other films, access to information in the torture porn genre serves to force a confrontation with the abject. This is in contrast to what we found in our earlier analysis – the lack of information created a feeling of dread in the Nine-Eleven films, frustration in the Testimonial films, and a feeling of horror in torture porn. In this case, torture porn inverts the descriptive frame where, instead of being a calming influence, the learned information causes more anxiety. For Kristeva, the "socialized appearance of the abject" comes from the manipulation of the rule of law where "corruption is its most common,

most obvious appearance."[674] The torture porn film works not only to deny the existing narratives, but invites the audience to dismiss the entire edifice through which those narratives are told – in this world, the descriptive frame itself becomes suspect.

Torture Porn: The attributive frame

The two themes that have emerged throughout our frame genre analysis so far is the move to action and the missing body. Looking first at the move to action, this theme emerges in two ways: what Kristeva would call the "pre-objectal" horror and sacrificial action.[675] The pre-objectal horror refers to when a character is trapped and / or denied basic needs like air, food, and motion (it is "pre-objectal" because it precedes the subject naming a fear object).[676] The pre-objectal is a key frightening element in torture porn and emerges in every film analyzed. An excellent example of pre-objectal horror occurs at the 41 minute-mark in *Hostel*, when the audience is first given a detailed look at the dungeon rooms inside the factory. From a black screen, the scene opens with a limited point-of-view shot from Josh's perspective.[677] He struggles to move, but cannot, and the audio makes it clear he has been shackled. He gasps for air, but the hood over his head limits his breathing. Through a small hole in the hood, Josh sees short glimpses of a room filled with fearsome instruments of pain, e.g. a chainsaw hanging on the wall and a table filled with medical supplies. A man enters the room wearing the factory-issued rubber apron

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[674] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 15-16.

[675] For Kristeva, pre-objectal horror is that which denies physiological needs like air, food, and water.

[676] For Kristeva, the pre-object horror is inherent in the human experience. As we will see, however, the way in which the pre-objectal horror relates to power is cultural. See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 32-34.

[677] This point-of-view shot is an additional nod to intertextuality in the horror genre. Josh's limited vision in this sequence (seeing only though the eye hole of a hood) suggests a re-appropriation of one of the most famous point-of-view shots in horror history: the opening sequence to John Carpenter's *Halloween*, in which the audience sees a young Michael Meyers murder his sister through the child's Halloween mask. *Halloween*, Blu-Ray, directed by John Carpenter (1978; Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment 2007).

and surgical mask, and rips the hood from Josh's head.[678] The man moves to the table, considers his option, and selects a power drill. He moves frighteningly towards Josh, turns on the power tool, and plunges the drill bit into Josh's chest. Josh screams and, with tears streaming down his cheeks, vomits on himself.[679] In this short sequence, Josh is subjected to a variety of pre-objectal horrors: a denial of sight, a denial of movement, a denial of air. These horrors culminate in tortuous damage to his bodily integrity, and from it, he vomits in abjection.

Although such horror is evident in all of the films analyzed, Josh's vomiting episode reveals a unique way in which the torture porn film often deploys the pre-objectal.[680] For Kristeva, the ingesting of nourishment is a calming event, necessary for life. Its opposite, either excretion or tainted food and drink, is abjection. A common theme in torture porn is the use of tainted food for torture, and in 11 of the films analyzed, victims were drugged so that they could be taken to a black site. Seeming to understand the inherent pre-objectal horror in impure food and drink, *Wolf Creek*'s antagonist, Mick makes it a point to explain how pure the rainwater he's offering is. "Nothing like rain water from the Top-End," he exclaims, an innocent grin wrapped

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[678] It should be noted that the style of the hood Josh was wearing was eerily reminiscent of the one made famous by the Abu Ghraib "Gilligan" photograph.

[679] Throughout *Hostel*, those who are tortured are shown crying and vomiting. For Kristeva, actions such as these are common in the face of abjection as one tries to clean or purify one's self. While it could easily be argued that this would be the natural reaction by someone who was being tortured, it is also a consistent illustration that the film accepts torture as abjection. Kristeva writes, "During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

[680] In both the Nine-Eleven films and the Abu Ghraib films, the pre-objectal horror centers on deprivation. For example, in *World Trade Center*, John and Will are trapped in the rubble (deprivation of movement) and complain of how thirsty they are (deprivation of drink). In the Abu Ghraib films, the soldiers talk about how prisoners were forced to stand in stress positions (deprivation of movement) and weren't allowed to sleep (deprivation of rest). Many of these pre-objectal horrors are present in the torture porn films as well, but the genre also focuses on the contamination of nourishment, which is another example of inversion.

around his face. For Kristeva, our primal fear is "the *upsetting* of a bio-drive balance" where the subject negotiates psychical stability in relation to a necessary object.[681] That relationship between subject and object, however, is always-already impacted by culture and power, which is a theme often taken up by the torture porn film.

At the 15 minute-mark in *Hostel*, the protagonists are on the train to Slovakia. A Dutch businessman enters their compartment and sits with them. After stowing his luggage, he takes out a small salad and, using only his hands, begins to eat. Paxton looks at him with disdain and asks, sarcastically, "You need a fork there, chief?" The businessman looks up and replies, "No. I prefer to use my hands." Paxton snorts derisively, prompting the businessman holds up a thin piece of meat. "I believe people have lost their relationship with food," he explains. "They do not think 'this is something that dies for me so that I would not go hungry.' I like that connection." Watching the businessman pull the meat apart, his hands trembling, Paxton declares that he is a vegetarian. The businessman replies that he is "a meat-eater [because] it is human nature." Maintaining an aura of cool superiority, Paxton replies, "Well I'm human and it's not my nature." Through this exchange, the film asks us to consider the larger issue – how does culture impact the power-laden relationship between fearful subject and feared object? That this discussion would begin with food would not surprise Kristeva, who argues that, "food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories. A boundary between nature and culture, between the human and non-human."[682] Between the protagonists and the businessman, there is a cultural divide that filters their views of both what is natural and the power that accompanies it. The businessman slides his hand along Josh's thigh and asks him seductively, "Tell me, what

[681] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 33.
[682] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 75.

is your nature?" Josh recoils in revulsion at the man's touch and screams, "Don't touch! Don't you fucking touch me."[683] From this, the businessman quickly apologizes, gathers his belongings, and leaves in haste.

The connection between the pre-objectal, culture, and power come together again at the 23 minute-mark, as the men choose to spend their first night in Slovakia at a local nightclub. As Josh sits and complains to several women about his ex-girlfriend, one of them lights a cigarette. A look of disgust spreads across Josh's face and he excuses himself to step outside for some fresh air. Once outside, Josh uses an asthma inhaler and struggles to catch his breath, ultimately pushing aside the pre-objectal horror of being denied breath. Moments later, however, a group of children encircle Josh and threaten him with violence unless they are paid.[684] Just as it seems as though a conflict with the youthful mob is unavoidable, the Dutch businessman from the train appears and bribes

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[683] There is a recurring theme of touch as power in *Hostel*, which suggests that the decision to touch and be touched is pre-objectal in the film. For Kristeva, there is some connection between touch and defilement as well. For example, she notes that there was a norm in Vienna for doctors to wash their hands even before people knew about microbes. The fear was that a doctor may touch a corpse and then deliver a child, creating a bridge between death and the beginnings of life. See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 159. In *Hostel*, there are several examples that speak to a connection between touch and power. At the 5:30 minute-mark, the men are thrown out of a nightclub in Amsterdam and Josh screams at the bouncer, "Get your hands off me!" Culture and power then become entwined with touch when Josh informs the bouncer that he's "an American" and he "has rights," which would seem to include the right not to be touched. In Act II, at the 33 minute-mark, Josh and Paxton follow a man who appears to be wearing Oli's coat. Paxton grabs the man's arm and says, "That's our friend's jacket." The man pulls away and says, "Get your fucking hands off me. This is my jacket." Here, the implication is that, at least in the minds of the Americans, the "rights of Americans" is not only to decide if they want to be touched, but also the power to impose touch on others. The Slovakian's refusal to accept that touch illustrates the conflict that can occur when the universal pre-objectal intersects with cultural assumptions.

[684] In most cultures, it is assumed that children should be carefree, innocent and playful, blissfully ignorant of the evil in the world. When children are made aware, or even more so, when they are the carriers of evil, this behavior is unsettling. Although this example of "children as carriers of evil" is not necessarily abjection proper, it does seem to be a mark of an overarching horror, and is important for Paxton's vengeful role reversal in Act III. The children in this scene are the same ones Paxton bribes to murder the police officers at the end of the film, which would seem to make his actions even more horrifying. Not only did Paxton become what he hated / feared, he deployed the defiled innocence of childhood to carry out his revenge. For an example of how children are used to illustrate abjection in fiction, see Kristeva's discussion of Virginia's behavior in *Guignol's Band* and the way Céline evokes affective responses through her use of child characters' word choice. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

the children to leave with a few coins. Thankful, and clearly embarrassed by his behavior on the train, Josh offers to buy the businessman a drink. For the audience, this offer can be read either as a peace offering or as a more subtle play for power, because, although the pre-objectal is universal, control over the cultural influences is rooted in power. For the businessman, he controls the pre-objectal nature of his food by eating with his hands. For Josh, he controls the pre-objectal nature of food and drink by acting as a provider, placing him in a position of power.[685] According to Kristeva, the providing of food and drink allows one to "wiel[d] a power that is as vital as it is fierce."[686] And it is that same fierce power that leads to Josh's ultimate fate. As Kristeva notes, "all food is liable to defile" where compromised bodily integrity "is opposed to the social condition."[687] Later that evening, Josh is drugged through defiled drink and taken to the factory where his torturer, the Dutch businessman, enacts and wins the final power play between them.[688]

A second way in which the move to action theme emerges is through the choice to make a personal sacrifice. This is present in 14 of the films and, most notably in the *Saw*

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[685] I believe this is a fair interpretation of Josh's behavior. There are several examples throughout the film where it is clear that the men are homophobic and / or obsessed with protecting their masculinity. They use a variety of homophobic slurs and even Josh's reaction on the train points to an underlying homophobia. If true, the businessman has now emasculated Josh both on the train (when he was ridiculed by his friends after the man touched him) and outside the nightclub by "saving" him from a group of children. It would make sense that Josh might hope to reclaim his masculinity and power by acting as a provider.

[686] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 76.

[687] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 75.

[688] During Josh's torture sequence, the businessman engages not only in physical torture, but psychological torture as well. Returning to the theme of touch that has been a dominant one in the two men's interactions throughout the film, the businessman tells Josh that he always wanted to be a surgeon. At the 43:30 minute-mark, he says, "A surgeon holds the very essence of life in his hands. *Your* life. He *touches* it." The businessman then reaches out and forcefully grabs Josh's thigh. Unlike on the train, Josh cannot pull back or stop the imposition of touch upon his body. The businessman leans in closer and rhetorically reduces Josh to a mere object. Reminiscent of his explanation as to why he eats with his hands, the businessman says, "He has a relationship with it. He's a part of it." This also sets up the connection, however obvious it may seem, between controlling the pre-objectal and torture. At the 58 minute-mark, as Paxton is being dragged down the hallway of the factory to be tortured, his focus is still on those who have the power to control touch. He screams over and over, "Get off me! Get the fuck off me!" Laid bare for the audience is not only the connection between power and touch, but the interplay between pre-objectal horror, abjection, culture, and the darkest nature of humanity.

series, can be a primary theme in the advancement of the plot.[689] In *Hostel*, when Paxton finally escapes from the factory at the 77 minute-mark; he hesitates in his escape when he hears the screams of a tortured woman inside. Deciding to sacrifice his personal security, Paxton makes the active decision to return to the factory in hopes of saving those tortured. When looking more closely at the personal sacrifice, another aspect of the move to action theme appears as well – what I term the vengeful role reversal. In all of the torture porn films considered, the climax involved a confrontation between the torturer and the tortured, but 12 of them added a vengeful role reversal where the previously tortured became the torturer.[690] For example, in *The Devil's Rejects*, Sherriff Wydell

[689] The two exceptions were both of the Rob Zombie films: *House of 1000 Corpses* and *The Devil's Rejects*. It should be noted that, in both of Zombie's films, substantially more screen time is given to the antagonists (such that one might argue that they exist as anti-heroes), which alters the way the story is told in some cases. In both of these films, however, there are sequences in which a character flees with disastrous results. In *House of 1000 Corpses*, Mary runs for her life only to be tracked down and murdered by Baby. In *The Devil's Rejects*, Amy runs blindly into the road where she is run over by a semi. I don't count either of these cases as a personal sacrifice, though an argument could be made that they are. These characters unquestionably sacrifice rational behavior for the hope of safety, but they are doomed absent their attempt to flee, which suggests to me that these are not true sacrifices, but forced choices. The *Saw* franchise is structured almost entirely around the premise of what people are willing to sacrifice in the name of survival. In the opening sequence to *Saw VI*, for example, two insurance adjusters are tasked with sacrificing their flesh to save their lives. They each have 60 seconds to put as much of their flesh on a scale as they can and the one who gives the most will live. Ultimately, Simone, hopelessly behind with just seconds to go, makes the decision to sever her arm with a cleaver, an act which saves her life (though dooms her colleague to a drill through the brain). *Saw VI*. It could be argued that, at least in the case of the *Saw* series, the filmmakers hope to explore what freedoms people may be willing to give up in the name of security through the use of this theme.

[690] In all of the films analyzed, the victims used violent means in an attempt to protect themselves, but I only considered it an example of "vengeful role reversal" if the violence served a gratifying purpose beyond self-preservation. As such, when Amy shot and killed one of her attackers in *Vacancy*, I did not count that as vengeful role reversal. In *Captivity*, however, when Jennifer shot one of her captors in the genitals before ultimately killing him, I did consider that vengeful role reversal because the violence served as gratification for the protagonist. In the four films where vengeful role-reversal was not a structural part of the narrative, it was replaced by either simple "justified violence" (*Vacancy* and *Wolf Creek*) or the tortured never really had the chance for such a response (*House of 1000 Corpses* and *The Strangers*). Although the question of "justified violence" (and the concept of "just war" as it relates to the War on Terror and the subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan) may be one that these films also comment on and could be a direction for future research, it lies outside the scope of this project.

takes the captured Firefly family back to their home.[691] Wydell proceeds to strap the three of them to their chairs and nails Otis' hands to the armrests for good measure. He staples crime scene pictures to the bodies of Baby and Otis before taking an electric cattle prod to Captain Spaulding. He thrills himself with the psychological torture of Baby, taunting her with the news of Mother Firefly's death, before fully embracing the aggression of abjection. Kristeva argues that abjection "wavers between the *fading away* of all meaning and humanity, burnt as by the flames of a conflagration" and the ego which finds "the height of harmony" in total loss.[692] She concludes with the words of Dostoyevsky: "I really don't know if it is possible to watch a fire without some enjoyment."[693] Wydell, in the abjected space of lost humanity and the joy of the cleansing flame, sets the house on fire in hopes of burning them alive.[694]

In *Hostel,* Paxton kills over a dozen people, but the final six represent his vengeful role reversal.[695] In addition to the differing motivations for these killings, the way in which Paxton murders the final six is telling as well.[696] At the 81 minute-mark, as

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[691] The Firefly home holds special significance for Wydell because it was where Otis murdered his brother in *House of 1000 Corpses*. This sequence further follows a scene in which Wydell brutally murders Mother Firefly when she is in his custody.

[692] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 18. *Emphasis in original*.

[693] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 18.

[694] Although there are other examples of vengeful role reversal that will be discussed, this sequence in particular is particularly poignant. First, there are multiple examples of abjected torture, from the physical torture that sacrifices bodily integrity, to the psychological torture as he taunts Baby with her mother's death, to the symbolism of pure abjection through fire. And, second, this sequence can serve as an extended criticism of the assumptions present in the Nine-Eleven films regarding the nobility of state action. Sherriff Wydell is no longer upholding his oath to "protect and serve," but has descended into a vengeful, abjected state, reminiscent of Lacan's "Dark God." Moving past the Testimonial film's surface criticisms of the chain-of-command, this sequence holds open the wound of torture for interrogation of the act itself.

[695] Because it is often impossible to know the motivations of a cinematic character beyond what we, as an audience, assign to their actions, I have tried to give Paxton the benefit of the doubt throughout this reading. That said, even if one excuses all of the violence perpetuated by Paxton through his saving the Japanese tourist, there are still six killings that cannot be explained as anything but vengeful.

[696] In every killing prior to his vengeful role-reversal, Paxton used a gun, a weapon that can kill quickly and comparatively painlessly, is preferred for its efficiency, and a weapon described in the film as purely "American." The final six killings, however, are quite different.

Paxton is driving to the train station, he sees Svetlana and Natalia talking with Alexi.[697] At this point, Paxton realizes that the entire situation was a set-up from the beginning and a look of fury spreads across his face. He slams down on the accelerator and runs the three of them over. Moments later, Paxton uses a bag of bubblegum to bribe a group of children to ambush two police officers on the factory payroll. Several of the children destroy the car with bats and violently smash in the cops' heads with rocks while others watch, smile, and blow bubbles with the gum they were given. It is the final killing, however, that is the most indicative of Paxton's desire for violent revenge. At the 86:30, while Paxton is safely on a train back to Amsterdam, he hears the Dutch businessman that tortured and killed Josh. When the train finally reaches the station, Paxton follows the businessman into the bathroom. As the businessman sits on the toilet, Paxton slides the business card for the "Elite Hunting Club" (the torture-factory) under the stall. When the businessman reaches down to pick up the card, Paxton grabs his hand and cuts off two of the businessman's fingers.[698] Paxton then bursts into the stall, pushes the businessman's face into the toilet several times until he nearly drowns, and then slits his throat with the same scalpel Josh's throat was cut with. Immediately after the murder, Paxton re-boards the train and leaves the city. The vengeful role reversal in *Hostel*, and many of the other torture porn films, provides an "eye-for-an-eye" explanation for vengeance.[699] The

[697] Svetlana and Natalia are the two women who successfully drugged and sold Josh to the factory, and attempted to do the same to Paxton. Alexi is the man they met in Amsterdam who encouraged them to make the trip to Slovakia in the first place.

[698] As an additional level to the symbolism, the two fingers that are cut off correspond to the same two fingers that Paxton lost during his time being tortured in the factory.

[699] In *Hostel*, Paxton's response is "even" in that he took the same two fingers that he lost and used the same scalpel that was used to kill Josh. It is also possible that one might read Paxton's repeated shoving of the businessman's head into the toilet as an allusion to waterboarding through the simulation of drowning in both.

cathartic release that accompanies the climax taps into a dark corner of the subject's psyche – the joy we may take from revenge.[700]

Another way in which the move to action theme emerges is through how it becomes stymied by cultural inversion in the plot. In this case, a cultural inversion is when the mechanisms of the system that had served to benefit the protagonists are suddenly turned against them. This turns the protagonists from active agents into passive bodies and the most common way this theme emerges in torture porn is through what I term the "perverted exchange paradigm." The exchange paradigm is the social mechanism that normalizes the assumption that everything exists only in relation to it ability to be exchanged for something else and, for scholar Genevieve Vaughan, the power and ubiquity of capitalism ensures that "the exchange paradigm reigns unquestioned."[701] For her, the logic of capitalism is so pervasive that even alternatives maintain an assumption of exchange – the ability to get something for something else, that everything has a price. In the United States, one of the ways the exchange mechanism manifests itself is through the "American Dream," the promise that if a person works hard enough s/he will be rewarded with the ability to purchase a materially better life. If you want a sleek German car, work hard and you can buy it. If you want sumptuous French food, earn more and you can eat at the finest French restaurants. If you want a beautiful summer home in Italy, put in the overtime and you can live the

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[700] This is an issue that will be taken up in much greater detail in the final chapter. I argue that torture porn films allow audiences to confront their inner demons when it comes to issues such as torture. It is possible, of course, that a person may not feel joy or a cathartic release when experiencing these films. I do not, however, believe that this short-circuits their psychotherapeutic potential. If an audience member does not experience a dark joy from the vengeful role reversal, then it seems likely that s/he believes that torture is universally wrong, a position they then share with the film. All of these films abhor torture, but ask us to confront our sick desires in relation to the act. If one doesn't have such sick desires, then one can simply be constituted by the film as the subject who universally abhors torture.

[701] Genevieve Vaughan, *For-Giving: A Feminist Criticism of Exchange* (New York: Plain View Press, 1997), 31.

Mediterranean lifestyle. And, of course, if you don't want the trouble of cleaning that Italian villa, you can just pay a local to do it for you. Everything is for sale, the exchange paradigm intones, and the American Dream provides you the opportunity to buy it all. The "perverted exchange paradigm," however, is when that assumption is questioned or when the American subject shifts from the buyer / consumer to the seller / consumed.[702] The perverted exchange paradigm emerges in every one of the films analyzed, manifested either through inverting cultural consumption or inverting the logic of exchange.

The inversion of cultural consumption emerges in seven of the films analyzed and occurs when the film critiques the assumption that the American subject "betters him or herself" through the consumption of other cultures. When the setting was domestic, this theme is often depicted as the rich urban consumption of the poor rural that was inverted. For example, in *The Strangers* James and Kristen have just returned from a wedding and intend to spend the night in his family's posh cabin. They note that they will enjoy the seclusion and are glad they don't have to drive back home so late at night. These comments smack of rich elitism and a family who may have lovely cabins strewn around the country and convenient rest stops for transnational travel. When the setting was international, however, the critique focused on the direct consumption of culture. For example, in *Turistas*, the protagonists hoped to "blend in" with the locals by drinking local alcohols and frolicking topless on the beach. In *Hostel* and *Hostel: Part II*, several characters begged others to go to museums so that could "expand their horizons." While many in the audience wouldn't think twice about the assumption that a day at the

[702] For those who wish to find it, an additional criticism can be found that connects the exchange paradigm to the War on Terror and torture. Rick Groen writes, "the source being tapped is the moral fallout from the war on terror - specifically, the sanctioning of torture. Of course, this being a horror flick, that sanctioning must undergo its own awful mutation. So the film transforms what is now politically defensible, for reasons of national security, into something that has become commercially viable, for reasons of kinky fun and dirty profit." Rick Groen, "'Hostel' Hints at Real Horrors," *The Globe and Mail*, January 6, 2006, Film section, R13. LexisNexis.

museum would expand the tourists' cultural appreciation, they may hesitate when seeing the Other consume our culture (as Paxton did when seeing the Eastern Europeans enjoy *Pulp Fiction*). The perverted exchange paradigm makes cultural consumption a two-way endeavor.

Another way in which the perverted exchange paradigm emerges is through the interrogation of the logic of exchange – the assumption that everything is for sale and that it is engaged in willingly. ged in willingly. For Jorge Larrain, the market obscures the fact that exchange is often rooted in coercion and force.[703] In 10 of the films analyzed, the power disparities that underpin the coercion inherent in exchange is laid bare. For example, in the *Saw* series, Jigsaw offers his victims life and freedom in exchange for bodily damage, an exchange that is willful only in that one could, theoretically, choose death. In reality, however, the game is rigged such that the exchange (the tortured victim does damage to him or herself) is demanded by the person in power. In *Hostel*, Josh explicitly calls the assumption that everything is for sale into question. Complaining that he doesn't want to go to Amsterdam's Red Light district, Josh says, "Paying to go into a room to do whatever you want to someone isn't exactly a turn-on." Further, just as Vaughan noted that the exchange paradigm was so much a part of our cultural understanding that it is rendered invisible, *Hostel* questions if it is possible for the characters to escape the logic of exchange either. For example, at the 22 minute-mark, Josh and Paxton are given drugs, drinks and sex by Natalia and Svetlana. From a strategic standpoint, there is no reason that the women have to give any of this to the men

[703] Jorge Larrain notes the hidden coercion of the exchange paradigm: "Although the production and appropriation of surplus value occurs at the level of production, capital and labour first come into contact through the market. … [T]he process of production and extraction of surplus value is concealed by the operation of the market which becomes the source of ideological representations such as the idea of a 'fair wage', equality, freedom, etc." Jorge Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morely and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 56.

– they could easily have given them the "knock-out" drug in place of the Ecstasy and sold them to the factory one day earlier.[704] It becomes abundantly clear later in the film that these women care nothing about Josh or Paxton, so their behavior seems to be guided only by the norm of exchange. Unwittingly, Josh and Paxton trade flesh for flesh – bodily pleasures one night in exchange for pain the next.

The second theme that has emerged in our analysis is the missing body, which presents itself in torture porn as the driving force in Act II – the search for missing friends and the horror of the reappearing body.[705] In all of the films analyzed, persons went missing and the protagonists searched for them; further, in all of the films, the audience is permitted to see what damage is done to the body when it is missing. One way in which this is shown appears in all of the films analyzed – the confinement of a protagonist. In many instances, the confinement is a literal prison; for example, in *Captivity*, Jennifer is locked in a cell and, in *Wolf Creek*, Kristy is bound and strung up in a garage.[706] At other times, however, the confinements are less literal. For example, in *Saw II*, Detective Matthews is told by Jigsaw that if he leaves, Matthew's son will die. Although Matthews can technically leave at any point, the threat keeps him rooted in his

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[704] In fact, this is exactly what the proprietor of the hostel does with Oli.

[705] For example, in *Hostel: Part II*, Lorna is taken to the factory, which prompts her surviving friends, Beth and Whitney, to hunt for her. In regards to the two exceptions, *Vacancy* and *The Strangers*, the lack of this theme might be explained because they both took advantage of the disappearing body theme and there were only two protagonists in these films. In all the other films, there were multiple protagonists, at least one of which could "go missing" and prompt a search by the survivors. From a basic storytelling imperative, there needs to be interaction; if one of the protagonists were to go missing in *The Strangers*, for example, there would be nobody for the remaining hero(ine) to talk to. Even in the case of these two exceptions, however, there is still a separation of the protagonists – in *The Strangers*, Kristen is alone in the house for an extended period of time, and in *Vacancy*, there is an extended sequence where Amy hides alone in the ceiling crawlspace.

[706] *Captivity*, DVD, directed by Roland Joffé (Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2007). *Wolf Creek*, DVD, directed by Greg McLean (2005; Santa Monica, CA: Genius Entertainment, 2006).

chair.[707] In *Hostel*, the protagonists find themselves trapped both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense, all of the protagonists find themselves trapped in the torture factory at some point. In the figurative sense, Paxton traps the men in Slovakia when he convinces Josh that this is their last opportunity to have fun together.[708]

The horror of the reappearing body is a theme in all of the films analyzed and horrifies by revealing what happened while the body was missing. This means not every returning body is a reappearing body. For example, in *The Strangers*, Kristen is first terrorized when James has left to go to the store to buy cigarettes. Unable to contact him on the phone, she prays for his return and is relieved when he walks through the front door moments later – James is not a reappearing body here because nothing happened to him while he was missing. In *Saw IV*, on the other hand, the opening sequence shows two men tied together, one with his eyes sewn shut, and the other with his mouth sewn shut (rendering communication between them impossible). A winch begins to pull the men together and, in a panic, one kills the other.[709] When investigators discover the scene, they activate the horror of the reappearing body, not because they didn't want to find the men, but because of the torture that was inflicted upon them.

Further, there is often an interaction between the early inversions and the theme of the missing body. For example, *Hostel* binds together Josh and Paxton's early obliviousness to the horror of the reappearing body. At the 29 minute-mark, Josh is distraught at Oli's disappearance and leaves him countless notes and voicemails in hopes of locating him. Paxton is also disappointed that Oli has disappeared, but he tells Josh

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[707] *Saw II*, DVD, directed by Darren Lynn Bousman (2005; Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation, 2006).
[708] In this way, there are certain thematic similarities between how the abjection of bodily integrity is dealt with in the Nine-Eleven films and in torture porn.
[709] *Saw IV*.

that they "really don't know him" and that their connection to Oli is superficial. To Paxton, it isn't surprising that Oli might just up and leave without saying good-bye. "People meet each other then split to another country without saying shit," Paxton explains. "It's just how they do it over here." In this case, it's easy for Paxton to avert his eyes, push the issue to the back of his mind, and explain the disappearance away. Even when the mounting evidence suggests that something is terribly wrong, Paxton is unmotivated to take action; he convinces Josh to forget about Oli, have one last party night in Slovakia, and leave the whole mess behind them when they guys leave for Barcelona the next morning. It is only when Josh goes missing that night that Paxton begins his search in earnest and discovers his friend's corpse at the torture factory. It is Paxton's almost willful obliviousness that makes the reappearing body all the more horrifying.

Finally, in all of the torture porn films, there is the horror of the reappearing body, but 11 of the films featured an additional layer of repetition that accompanied that horror. In films like *Vacancy* and *Wolf Creek*, the discovery of videos shows that the killers have a pattern to their killings. In *The Strangers*, the audience learns that the killers intend to make these tortures a regular occurrence; as they drive away together, one of the killers says to another, "It'll be easier next time." In the *Saw* series, Jigsaw's torturous repetition is passed on from person to person, from John Kramer, the original Jigsaw killer, to his former victim turned protégé Amanda Young, to Mark Hoffman, the detective who investigates the crimes. This theme of repetition brings us, again, back to the potential for dialectic mediation in torture porn, as these themes recur again and again as an attempt to work-through the remainder left behind by the master and counter-narratives at the level of cultural discourse. With that in mind, let's turn our attention to

how torture porn fits in as the third, and often unrecognized, piece to an on-going dialectic.

THE DIALECTICAL MEDIATION

In an essay that makes sense of the reconciling between the rise of Protestantism and the establishment of global capitalism, Fredric Jameson theorizes what he terms the "vanishing mediator," which acts as "a catalytic agent [permitting] an exchange of energies between two otherwise mutually exclusive terms" and is "removed when its usefulness is over."[710] For Slavoj Žižek, the vanishing mediator is the third moment of the dialectic.[711] He explains that the vanishing mediator "emerges because of the way, in a dialectical process, form stays behind content: first, the crucial shift occurs within the limits of the old form, even taking on the appearance of its renewed assertion … then, once the [work is finished], the old form can fall off."[712] For Jameson, Protestantism becomes consistent with capitalism by acting as the mediator between feudalism and capitalism. Prior to the rise of Protestantism, economics and religion were distinct and people proved their spiritual worth through material self-denial. Protestantism universalized religion, merging religion with economics, and encouraged people to prove their spiritual worth through work and the accumulation of goods. I suggest that neither the Nine-Eleven master narrative nor the counter-narrative of the Testimonial films engaged the issue of torture directly, leaving it as a hard kernel of the Real. I argue that the rise of torture porn happened, at least in part, because a rhetorical vacuum that existed demanding an interrogation of torture lest the entire edifice collapse. Let us, then,

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[710] Fredric Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber," *New German Critique* (1973): 78.
[711] Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (New York: Routledge, 2003). This is what Žižek calls the negation of the negation.
[712] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Now What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (New York: Verso, 1991), 185.

examine the mediation potential of torture porn between the Nine-Eleven master narrative and counter-narrative.

Torture porn mediates the Nine-Eleven dialectic by directly engaging what the other films side-stepped. Thematically, abjection and bodily integrity is present in both the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films, but only in torture porn is there a graphic depiction of gore and a spectacle of violence. In every torture porn film analyzed, there were numerous depictions of bodily damage done to the confined protagonist.[713] There are literally dozens of examples that include multiple decapitations, severed limbs, disembowelments and gaping wounds. For example, in *Hostel: Part II*, a woman is hung, by her feet, from the ceiling while another woman slices her open with a scythe to bathe in her blood.[714] These films feature gory sequences not only focused on the main characters, but of random extras as well. For example, in the opening scene of *Captivity*, tubes are forcibly inserted into a man's nose. Through one of the tubes, the torturers force battery acid up into the man's head as blood flows out of the other tube. The audience never learns who this man is or is given the opportunity to connect to him in any way – the sequence seems to exist only as a spectacle of violence.[715]

Much like the thematic inversions explained earlier, the willingness of the torture porn film to embrace such a spectacle highlights the nature of abjection and the potential for violence to "burst upon us at any time, even when we least expect it, even when the

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[713] Although they did have depictions of bodily damage, both *The Strangers* and *Vacancy* were less graphic and had more examples of psychological torment and torture than the other films.

[714] *Hostel: Part II*, DVD, directed by Eli Roth (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007).

[715] For Catherine Zimmer, there is a connection between the spectacle of violence in torture porn and the role of surveillance in post Nine-Eleven world. She argues that taped surveillance in particular, impacts the narrative structure in torture porn and speaks to issues of what we see and what we can know through those images. Catherine Zimmer, "Caught on Tape? The Politics of Video in the New Torture Film," in *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*, eds. Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

sun is shining, even in the safety of our own beds, ravaging the life we take for granted, staging the spectacle of the ruined body."[716] According to Becker, one of the most fundamental fears humans possess is the notion of rot in its corporeal being. For humans, a primal necessity is the maintenance of bodily integrity and we live in constant fear of damage to our relatively fragile physical body and the "most repugnant way … it aches and bleeds and will decay and die."[717] For many, the "most widely recognized rights in both legal and moral theory is the right to bodily integrity … [and] the ban on torture is one expression of this right."[718] This notion of bodily integrity is not only an instrumental part of the discussion surrounding torture, but it is one of the driving forces behind "civilized" society's approach to punishment. Foucault noted that, with the decline of public executions, "physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty."[719] For Kristeva, the loss of bodily integrity is the mark of "abjection brought about by physical defect. … The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic."[720] It is nearly impossible to overstate the impact of torture as it sacrifices bodily integrity: it

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[716] Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 19.

[717] Becker, *Denial of Death*, 26. The phrase "bodily integrity" can mean different things depending on its context, but, for this project, I intend it to be the ability to keep one's physical being free from pain and damage.

[718] David P. Gushee, "5 Reasons Torture is Always Wrong," *Christianity Today* 50 (2006): 35. EBSCOhost (19553647).

[719] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 11.

[720] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 102. Viewed in relation to her theorizing on both the abject and semiotics, this is a damning condemnation of torture from Kristeva. For her, the subject is always "in-process," which is to say that the subject is in constant negotiation between body and text, the semiotic and the Symbolic. As such, the subject is constituted by both the physical body and its incorporation into language; an abjected body that is denied integration into language is forever denied access to the "process" of subjectivity and finds itself not interrupted (as Kristeva argues is the tension between body and text), but vaporized from even the illusion of unity.

evokes the deepest of human fears, it denies human and moral rights to the tortured, it is an affront to civilization, and forever bears the mark of abjection.

Throughout its running time, *Hostel* continually reminds the viewer of the centrality of bodily integrity. Beginning with the opening credit sequence, the audience sees a man (the butcher) going about his "everyday" job of cleaning up the torture rooms, picking up the dismembered limbs, washing blood and broken teeth down the drain, and organizing the torture devices, all while whistling a jaunty tune. This is an unsettling juxtaposition, as it not only reduces bodily damage to the role of paperwork, but almost makes the job appear fun. We encounter this man again at the 69 minute-mark, when Paxton attempts to escape from the factory. As Paxton hides under a pile of corpses, what Kristeva calls "the utmost of abjection," the butcher removes jewelry before emotionlessly chopping up lifeless bodies to throw into the incinerator.[721] Not only does this illustrate the denial of humanity to the victims, reducing them to mere objects, they are objects not even worth keeping (unlike the rings and watches removed from them). Of course, this approach to the bodies of the victims is nothing but a natural outgrowth of the mentality towards the victims while they were still alive. To offer up a person for torture reveals a fundamental disregard of them as a feeling subject worthy of rights. To the torture-factory, they are nothing but piles of flesh to be burned in death, and nothing but squirming sacks of meat in life, always-already abject.

The tortured body exists not only as an object, but importantly as an unclean object. At the 72 minute-mark in *Hostel*, Paxton, still hoping to escape the factory, masquerades as a customer in the "preparation room."[722] As he waits for his best chance

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[721] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

[722] The "preparation room" is a waiting room of sorts, where customers get dressed and wait before being taken to the inner dungeon rooms in the factory.

to make a run for it, he encounters an American customer who is overly excited about his first time in the factory. As the American emerges from a dressing room, the audience learns that all of the factory customers are given surgical masks to wear, to which the American remarks, "I feel like a fucking butcher or a surgeon or some shit. I feel so ridiculous in this thing, but I guess you need it, huh?" The implied "need" is that the apron and mask serve a functional purpose in the dungeon, to keep the abject fluids at bay. Kristeva writes, "Contrary to what enters the mouth and nourishes, what goes out of the body, out of its pores and openings, points to the infinitude of the body proper and gives rise to abjection."[723] To the torturers, the tortured is never human, but simply a festering mound of infection.[724]

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[723] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 108.

[724] This connection between abjection, infection, and bodily integrity manifests itself in more subtle ways as well. At the 9:30 minute-mark in *Hostel*, Alexi convinces the protagonists to go to Slovakia. Although Alexi never does anything that would suggest he is dishonest, he is immediately understood as evil by a savvy audience because of a sore on his lip. Kristeva notes that such skin lesions, an "impairment of the cover that guarantees corporeal integrity, sore on the visible, presentable surface" is a manifestation of bodily abjection. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 101. Symbolically, Alexi cannot be trusted for no reason other than he bears the unclean mark of decay. The argument here is simply that the decision by the filmmakers to give Alexi an obvious sore, therefore marking him as evil, is a more subtle indication that torture (and those who assist in it) are abject. In this same scene, however, Alexi also promises the men that a trip to Slovakia ensures that they will be able to have sex with multiple beautiful women merely because they are American. "They hear your accent and they go crazy," he says. "If you want, you just take them." The sore on Alexi's lip suggests that he suffers from a sexually transmitted disease, which can also serve as a coded critique of overconsumption. The message can be read as a moral warning that those who tread in abjection will become marked, either through disease, or, in the case of factory customers, through tattoos. At the 75 minute-mark, the audience learns that all factory customers receive a tattoo on their forearm of a bloodhound – the logo of the "Elite Hunting Club." For Kristeva, healthy skin is the representation of a clean and proper body, the necessary border that keeps abjection at bay. The decision to permanently alter one's skin is not one to be entered into lightly and the person who chooses this path is forever marked, both literally and figuratively. In terms of our cultural stories, Keven McCarron notes that in "contemporary literary texts, the tattoo is always represented as unnatural" and bound with those who choose to live outside of social norms. Kevin McCarron, "Skin and Self-Indictment: Prison Tattoos, Race, and Heroin Addiction," *English Studies in Canada* 34 (2008): 86. EBSCOhost (44329521). In *Hostel*, to join the club that trades in abjection, one must first agree to abject themselves. In the preparation room, the American customer proudly shows Paxton his tattoo, and becomes angry when Paxton hesitates to show his. The American grabs Paxton's arm and attempts to forcibly roll up his sleeve. "Come on, man," the American growls. "We're all in the same club." To be in the club, one must be permanently marked in an attempt to attain mastery over abjection.

In this section, I argued that, unlike the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films, torture porn does not shy away from a direct confrontation with the horror of torture. In the larger context of the cultural conversation, I suggest that torture porn acts as a vanishing mediator between the master narrative betokened by the Nine-Eleven films and the counter-narrative represented in the Testimonial films. The torture porn films act as a rhetorical mediator between the *texts* of the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films and the master and counter-narrative they represent. I will suggest that torture porn, as a vanishing mediator, allows the opportunity for an audience to work-through the trauma of state-sponsored torture by the consumption of these dialectical rhetorics. Because of its belated nature, a trauma becomes bracketed off as a missed experience and is repeated. Once a trauma has been worked-through, the vanishing mediator that removes the brackets from the trauma is allowed to fall away.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I performed a frame genre analysis of the torture porn films and found a thematic and structural pattern similar to the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films, but nearly always in an inverted form. As with the other films, information is a driving force in torture porn, but the revelation of information is often a catalyst for more horror. The question of who the protagonists are is also complicated in torture porn as many of the cultural norms (like the exchange paradigm) become perverted. In terms of the move to action theme, action is valorized in torture porn, as it is in the Nine-Eleven films, but often comes with a price that is absent from the Nine-Eleven films. In torture porn, the move to action is almost always accompanied by the vengeful role reversal, which calls into question the place of the protagonist as the moral hero in the story. Further, the missing body theme in torture porn is inverted as the reappearing body, which becomes a

horrifying element instead of a source of relief. I also outlined how torture porn acts to mediate the dialectic between the Nine-Eleven master narrative and counter-narrative by directly engaging the horror of torture. In the next chapter, I will return to psychoanalysis and theories of trauma discussed earlier to more fully explicate the affective frames of these three groups of films in order to suggest that torture porn offers an opportunity for the audience to work-through the horror of torture and feelings of personal complicity they may feel with Abu Ghraib.

Chapter 6

The Psychotherapeutic Potential of Film

So far I have argued that people come to know their world through the stories that they tell, that the stories we share as a culture are master narratives, that cultures challenge those master narratives dialectically through counter-narratives, and that rhetoric negotiates national identities and constitutes subjects and social bodies through mediated texts. We can better understand the constitution of the American Subject for example, by analyzing patterns in the rhetorical artifacts that are born from social bodies, and these rhetorical artifacts serve multiple functions during times of traumatic cultural upheaval. More specifically, I have argued that the Nine-Eleven master narrative has held tremendous power for the American Subject and that the Abu Ghraib scandal was a point of traumatic upheaval in that narrative, prompting a counter-narrative and a mediating force that reckoned with the horror of torture. I have examined over 250 news media texts as well as 20 films in three different categories, representing the master narrative, the counter narrative, and an indirect negotiation of them both in torture horror films, for thematic and structural patterns. The more challenging theoretical issue I now take up is how these themes and patterns interact with the trauma of torture therapeutically, and the potential for what psychoanalytic critics term "working-through." To this end, I first return to the concept of "abjection."

Torture, in both practice and definition, matters a great deal as it relates to abjection. The abject is that which violates borders or, more specifically, that which denies them. The practice of torture turns the tortured subject into an object, denying the most basic border between the two that is necessary for identity. As a tortured object, the

skin as a border may be cut or the boundaries of psychical defenses compromised. These collapsing limits do not represent a failed border between life and death, but can be understood as death – that is, an ungraspable meaningless – itself. Kristeva writes,

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. … It is death infecting life. Abject.[725]

Torture is abjection, not simply in the damage done to the subject turned object, but to the order of the system. The border between order and chaos is a commitment to a rule of law, to a civil society, to agreements made between people, and a morality that are all rhetorically constituted. Abjection, in this sense, is "what disturbs identity, system [and] order."[726] As a consequence of the Geneva Conventions and the United Nations Convention Against Torture ratified in 1987, the United States has agreed not to torture and, thus, does not. If the administration were to have condoned such actions, it would deny the social (b)order and expose itself as "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it."[727] As such, the administration and master narrative are very clear: the United States does not torture.

In the previous chapter, I explained that two of the three groups of films analyzed repress the abjection of torture itself, choosing to engage in questions of agency or definitional distractions instead. In this chapter, I examine the therapeutic dimensions of all of the films with the help of the psychoanalytic theory established earlier. To this end,

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[725] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3-4.
[726] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[727] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

I examine the affective frame of each of the films, which I have yet to discuss, highlighting the psychoanalytic dimensions.[728] First, I will examine the Nine-Eleven films in the context of negative sublimity. Second, I will offer that the Testimonial films are examples of working-off and acting-out. And finally, I will examine the torture porn films and their potential to work-through the trauma of Abu Ghraib by directly engaging the issue of torture in a way the other films refuse.

THE NINE-ELEVEN FILMS

Psychoanalysis tells us that when a person experiences a trauma, the deployed defense mechanism becomes an instinctive part of the subject's ego arsenal. In her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, Anna Freud argues that subjects often deploy an "unvarying use of a special method of defense" when confronted with traumatic patterns.[729] According to Lacan, subjects who encounter tangential traumas often return to prior defenses in an attempt to neutralize the traumatic impact.[730] In some social cases, the defense is to ignore the dissonance that marked the trauma. Robert Entman writes,

> Journalists, sources, and audience members sharing a common political culture think and talk about unambiguous events like 9/11 in congruent ways. Reporters readily construct associations in the news matching the public's habits of

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[728] I devoted an entire chapter to the affective frame because this is where much of the rhetorical mediation occurs and is dependent upon a reckoning with the previous frames. I also separated this frame out in an attempt to maintain conceptual clarity.

[729] Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, trans. Cecil Baines (London: Karnac Books, 1937), 34.

[730] Lacan argues that, "an exhaustion of the defense mechanisms … turns out to be the other side of the unconscious mechanisms. … Periphrasis, hyperbaton, ellipses, suspension, anticipation, retraction, negation, digression, and irony, these are the figures of style … whose names strike me as the most appropriate ones with which to label these mechanisms. Can one see here mere manners of speaking, when it is the figures themselves that are at work in the rhetoric of the discourse the analysand actually utters?" Lacan, "Instance of the Letter," 433. Bruce Fink clarifies this particular section: "the analysand's discourse functions in accordance with a plethora of other mechanisms designed to keep the unconscious down. These mechanisms can be associated with what Freud called the defense mechanisms: The analysand spontaneously employs well-known rhetorical figures to keep from saying certain things and to keep certain ideas from surfacing." Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 72.

> thinking. Journalistic motivations also help to solidify the sway of the conventional framing over the news. … Sometimes the easiest response is to ignore the matter altogether.[731]

For Jan Jagodzinski, an individual can dismiss the trauma of Abu Ghraib, but that leaves "a gap in reality that must immediately be filled up" with "an object that substitutes." For him, the substitute object is the rhetorical frame that "the United States as a pure and innocent victim of the 9-11 attack."[732] From a psychoanalytic perspective, one of the ways that a traumatized individual can deal with the horror of Abu Ghraib is to ignore the very event by memorializing and invoking the memory of Nine-Eleven.[733]

A potential impact to such a memorialization, however, is that the citizens' trust may be surrendered to the State as a paternal figure. Erich Fromm, in an effort to understand the psychology of the German citizenry during the Third Reich, noted that when an individual feels powerless s/he has a "tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self [and] fuse one's self with somebody or something outside of oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking."[734] From this, the population may demand action (in exchange for their acquiescence) in hopes that it will provide them a feeling of mastery over the traumatic event. Yaacov Vertzberger

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[731] Robert Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 15.

[732] Jan Jagodzinski, "The Trauma of the Image: Prisoner 'Abuse' in Abu Ghraib Prison," *Simile* 6 (2006): par. 6. EBSCOhost (20087377).

[733] For Žižek, this is what reconciles excess. The collapse of the World Trade Center was both real and fiction – real in the sense that the buildings did collapse and people did die, but fiction in that it becomes a story, always-already in error and incomplete, told and re-told. Watching the towers collapse on a television screen brings into focus its contradictory characteristics, the event is real but our experience of it is not. The same holds true for the photographs of Abu Ghraib. As such, the excess that persists in its contradiction is reconciled by pairing it with the excess of the falling towers already experienced. Žižek writes, "The Real which returns has the status of a(nother) semblance: *precisely because it is real, that is, on account of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition*. This is what the compelling image of the collapse of the WTC was: an image, a semblance, an 'effect,' which, at the same time, delivered 'the thing itself.'" Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), 19. *Emphasis in original*.

[734] Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1941), 140.

notes that following a social trauma "people look for guidance from external sources of epistemic authority … [and] feel a powerful need for a demonstrative, active response that will provide them with a sense of control and direction."[735] In the context of terrorism, Keven Becker, Guy Sapirstein, and Jeffrey Weir argue that a national effort to seek revenge against those who carried out the attacks can provide "a sense of control over this or future events. … [T]he idea that 'if we can find and curtail the enemy we will once again be safe' is a strong motivator for many individuals."[736] For Freud, this connection of revenge to the traumatic memory marks a denial of abreaction (the separation of affect from a traumatic memory) that risks pathogenic action (a destructive, often violent, reaction).[737] Such a failure of abreaction further risks surrendering political agency to a paternal sovereign where the citizenry's superego is displaced by the moral will of a leader who, in the case of terrorism, is then tasked with exacting revenge.[738]

The Nine-Eleven films justify action by the state to secure its citizens. For their part, the Nine-Eleven films also provide a rhetorical justification for revenge. In *World Trade Center*, the 114-minute mark provides an explicit call for a vengeful response. Karnes walks through the rubble at ground zero as he phones into work telling them why he won't be returning to the relative comfort of his office job. "They're going to need some good men out there to avenge this," he says. A title card at the end reveals that Karnes re-enlisted in the Marines and served two tours in Iraq. At the very end of *United*

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[735] Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, "The Antinomies of Collective Political Trauma: A Pre-Theory," *Political Psychology* 18 (1997): 866-867. This is similar to Joshua Gunn's conclusions in Joshua Gunn, "Father Trouble: Staging Sovereignty in Spielberg's 'War of the Worlds'," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25 (2008). EBSCOhost (28829520).

[736] Becker, Sapirstein, and Weir, *Psychological Support*, 4.

[737] See the "Preliminary Statement" in Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. Nicola Luckhurst (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

[738] See Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1959). To be clear, Freud does not discuss terrorism or revenge for an attack, but he does argue that people's superego is displaced by a leader.

93, following a brief moment blackness after the plane crashes, the film's message is displayed across the screen: "Dedicated to the memory of all those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001." This was not, however, the original title card; an earlier cut of the film ended with the same smash cut to black, but the screen then read, "America's War on Terror had begun." Although the replacement title card does more in the film's effort to memorialize United 93, the original title card speaks to the emotional response an audience member likely felt after viewing the violent counter-attack by the passengers and "the only instant of catharsis" in the film.[739] As Lim notes, the "film's closing moments essentially memorialize 9-11 Bush style, as an occasion for revenge. Painful as this movie is, it's even more excruciating to imagine how it might play in some of the country's multiplexes."[740]

Giorgio Agamben contends that the surrendering of political agency for the sake of security creates a state of exception, the "threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism."[741] For Agamben, the legitimacy of juridical power is derived from this exception as "it nourishes itself on this exception and is a dead letter without it."[742] Rather than a temporary abdication of responsibility to the State, the state of exception becomes the rule, reducing the citizenry's political life (*polis*) into pure biological life (*bios*), "thereby tempting atrocity" that the system itself becomes a mechanism of death.[743] In an effort to protect the master narratives that structure the national identity, the action demanded by the citizenry is often one of violent revenge.

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[739] Lim, "A Flight To Remember", par. 2. A more detailed discussion of the film as memorial will take place in the next section when we analyze how the story was told.
[740] Lim, "A Flight To Remember", par. 2.
[741] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.
[742] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 27.
[743] Gunn, "Father Trouble," 22.

As Alexander explains, "In the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge."[744] Lacan contends that this vengeful response is a product of being confronted with the limitations of fantasy and the threat of castration. He argues that the traumatized subject believes an offered sacrifice will suture the wound and fill in the realized lack in the Other. Lacan notes,

> The offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice is something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell. … [T]he sacrifice signifies that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other that I call here *the dark God*.[745]

Both *World Trade Center* and *United 93* offer justification for that sacrifice, asking the audience to feel first frustrated with the passivity of Act II, and then joy in the (sometimes violent) active response of Act III. In *World Trade Center*, Stone hopes the audience both shares the feeling of powerlessness the families experience as the dearth of information keep them from helping, and revels in the triumph of the collective action of the government which saves John and Will.[746] Conversely, *United 93* hopes its audience, endowed with the luxury of hindsight, is frustrated by a government so inept that, midway through Act II, it flies its fighter jets out over the Atlantic Ocean instead of towards the hijacked planes. In Act III, it is the action of the individual over the impotence of the government that prevents United 93 from reaching Washington, D.C.[747]

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[744] Alexander, "Toward a Theory," 8.

[745] Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 175.

[746] Film critic for the *Florida Times-Union*, Matt Soergel, both noted Stone's desire to create an atmosphere of personal helplessness and contrasted it with the effect generated by *United 93*. He argued that these parts of the film are "agonizing, but there's little relief when Stone gives us long, pained interludes with the officers' waiting wives, their children and their extended families. This is where the film could have slipped up in easy sentiment, but it deals more satisfyingly in the rawness and the frustration of such a horrible, helpless time. I prefer the unvarnished, documentary-like horror of *United 93*, the year's other 9/11 film, over Stone's more conventional *World Trade Center*. But there's no denying the crafty involved in this film, and the scrupulous sensitivity as well." Matt Soergel, "Trapped and Terrified," *Florida Times-Union*, August 9, 2006, C section. LexisNexis.

[747] This is the conclusion that literary critic Elaine Scarry draws from the events on United 93. In her essay, "Citizenship in Emergency," she calls the passengers on United 93 "citizen soldiers" and argues that

The overarching message of the Nine-Eleven films serves to reinforce the cultural narrative that Americans should have faith that the government will provide you and your loved ones security, although, should the government fail, the heroism of the individual will rise to the occasion. When viewing Abu Ghraib against the backdrop of this message, its rationality begins to come into focus. If the world had fundamentally changed, the standards for the treatment of detainees also needed to change so that the government could keep Americans safe. And if the government were to be hamstrung in that effort, then the actions of the individual soldier would have to take its place.

For Agamben, leaders who gain legitimacy through the state of exception are never willing to surrender that power. He argues that these leaders will act to extend the state of exception by indefinitely evoking the social traumas that created it, which may account for the constant referrals to Nine-Eleven by the Bush administration. For Mark Setzer, this constant state of exception has created what he terms a "wound culture: the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound."[748] He contends that such a culture seeks out violent fantasies to mark sites of "the pathological public sphere" and act as relays "between vulnerably exposed, fetishized bodies and the witnessing and wounding crowd; between the seduction of public dream spaces and fantasies of violence."[749] Such a wound culture hopes to rhetorically relive traumatic events time and again. According to

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it is the obligation of the individual to act when the government fails to do so. Scarry writes, "We share a responsibility to deliberate about these questions, as surely as the passengers on Flight 93 shared a responsibility to deliberate about how to act. The failures of our current defense arrangements put an obligation on all of us to review the arrangements we have made for protecting the country. 'All of us' means 'all of us who reside in the country,' not 'all of us who work at the Pentagon' or 'all of us who convene when there is a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.'" Elaine Scarry, "Citizenship in Emergency: Can Democracy Protect Us Against Terrorism?," Boston Review, October/November, 2002, accessed May 8, 2012, http://bostonreview.net/BR27.5/scarry.html, par. 47.

[748] Mark Setzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (1997): 3.

[749] Setzer, "Wound Culture," 5, 24.

Dominick LaCapra, this reactivation of trauma "becomes an uncanny source of elation or ecstacy" for the social body.[750] Rather than working-through a trauma, the social body uses it as a foundation for its identity. LaCapra calls this "negative sublimity" and argues that some large-scale traumas, what he terms a "founding trauma," become something of a badge of honor for those who continue to endure it. He notes that founding traumas "paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group."[751] Such founding traumas demand constant attention and continual reactivation for fear that neutralizing the trauma is disrespectful. LaCapra writes,

> Those traumatized by extreme events, as well as those empathizing with them, may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it. … One's bond with the dead, especially with dead intimates, may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound. This situation may create a more or less unconscious desire to remain within trauma.[752]

According to Ross Chambers, negative sublimity in the social body risks creating a melancholic society where acknowledgment of the trauma will "always seem inadequate in relation to the known magnitude of the event."[753] For him, the melancholic society can never reclaim its political agency from the state of exception, which allows the State as death machine to rumble forward under the control of an unchecked sovereign.

Further, this negative sublimity can replicate itself in the fictive accounts of the melancholic society. In the closing scenes of *World Trade Center*, the audience watches

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[750] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 23.
[751] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 23.
[752] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 22-23.
[753] Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), xxii.

two Port Authority officers stand in the wreckage of the fallen towers. One of the men, with tears in his eyes, asks, "What do we do? There are thousands of people in there, dying. Where are they?" The film cuts to the New York City skyline where the Twin Towers have been replaced by billowing smoke. Shots of a desolate subway with homemade "missing persons" posters covering the walls follow. Allison and her family look at the posters with shock and sadness as the screen fades to white. According to Setzer, such fictional accounts mark fetishized sites of violence.[754] For Chambers, such heavy-handed memorializations represent cultural artifacts that are always-already the "melancholic writing of failed mourning."[755] And, according to LaCapra, such artistic representations can lead "to a compulsive preoccupation with aporia, an endlessly melancholic, impossible mourning, and a resistance to working through."[756] For each of these scholars, a rhetorical situation that reactivates a social trauma through fictional accounts points to the rhetorical desires of a melancholic nation.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive for someone to *want* to be traumatized or to *want* to be melancholic, the potential exists for a melancholic subject to be rhetorically constituted by efforts to memorialize Nine-Eleven. From the "Never Forget" bumper stickers commemorating September 11, to the eight acre memorial in New York City that "features two enormous waterfalls and reflecting pools, each about an acre in size, set within the footprints of the original twin towers … and creates a contemplative space."[757] These memorializations create a rhetorical reality for those constituted by it, and the constructed fantasy can be considered "more real" than reality itself. For example,

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[754] Setzer, "Wound Culture." When discussing the connection of fiction to wound culture, Setzer points to the television show *ER* and the enduring popularity of novels such as *The Red Badge of Courage*.
[755] Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, xxii, 319.
[756] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 23.
[757] "Design Overview," The 9/11 Memorial, 2012, accessed August 12, 2012, http://www.911memorial.org/design-overview, par. 1.

nobody knows what truly happened during the passenger revolt on flight United 93 – there is no record of the struggle beyond the flight voice recorder, which offers few details. The events depicted in the film are pure fantasy; they are only what the filmmakers hope to have happened, or perhaps more likely, what they think the audience wants to believe to have happened. This does not, however, diminish the "reality" of the film. Director Paul Greengrass made the decision to shoot the film primarily with handheld cameras in a cinema verité style to give it the feeling of a documentary and provide the audience a sense of immediacy and authenticity.[758] Everything in the first hour and a half of the film strove for authenticity and realism, even to the point of having many of the actual people from the event play themselves in the film.[759] The realism of it all, multiplied by what many reviewers termed "painstaking research," is so much that the final ten minutes, though unverifiable, represent what many believe to be "the best educated guess to what actually transpired on the plane that crashed into a Pennsylvania field instead of the Capitol."[760] Of course, whether these events "actually occurred" or not is of minimal consequence when discussing the manufacturing of a discursive "truth."

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[758] Giving the film four stars, film critic Claudia Puig wrote, "Filmed in real time and shot with handheld cameras, it has the urgency and grit of a documentary rather than a big-studio movie. … Greengrass was an inspired choice for a believable and harrowing depiction of that awful day." Claudia Puig, "Wrenching 'United 93' is Harrowing in its Realism," *USA Today*, April 25, 2006, Life section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[759] In *United 93*, the actual people who experienced the event played many of the roles. This list includes: FAA National Operations Manager Ben Sliney; FAA officials Tobin Miller, Rich Sullivan, and Tony Smith; Air Force Major James Fox, Senior ID Tech Shawna Fox, and First Lieutenant Jeremy Powell at the Northeast Air Defense Sector offices; Boston air traffic controller Tom Roberts; New York air traffic controllers Curt Applegate and Rick Tepper; and Newark air traffic controller Greg Callahan. *World Trade Center* did not go to such extensive lengths, but some efforts were made to build a feeling of authenticity in that film as well. Both John McLoughlin and Will Jimeno receive screen time as Port Authority officers at the barbeque that concludes the film and the New York firefighters in the film were played by real members of the NYFD that assisted in the rescue efforts.

[760] Joel Mowbray, "The Price of Complacency: Remembering Victims of Flight 93," *The Washington Times*, April 28, 2006, OPED section. LexisNexis. Neil Narine summarizes the efforts by the filmmakers to provide a feeling of authenticity to the film. He writes, "Cell phone conversations are reproduced in the film word for word; what appears to be documentary footage is interspersed amid staged scenes; and various air traffic controllers and others even play themselves, generating a powerful discursive apparatus

If the final ten minutes of *United 93* illustrates the political power of a rhetorical reality, the first five minutes of *World Trade Center* reminds us that it may be the only reality we can ever know. Against a black screen, the opening title card to *World Trade Center* reads, "These events are based on the accounts of the surviving participants." There is a nuance here that is important. Just as the more traditional title card, "based on a true story," may provide a film a certain narrative fidelity (after all, this *really happened*), the title card for *World Trade Center* suggests that the *only* narrative fidelity is what we *think* really happened. The reality of Nine-Eleven, as an event, is not confined by what *really happened*, but by the accounts of what happened – the story of Nine-Eleven, told and re-told. In the first five minutes of the film, there are four shots of the World Trade Center, all of which had to be digitally inserted. This stands in stark contrast to the film *Zoolander*, in which the producers had the Twin Towers digitally removed prior to its September 21, 2001 release date.[761] The spokeswoman for Paramount Pictures (the studio that distributed *Zoolander*) explained that the film was meant to be a silly comedy and the painful reminder of seeing the Twin Towers on screen would ruin that experience. In response, Mary F. Pols wrote, "there is something grotesque about taking a movie that's ready to hit screens around the country and fiddling with it this way. … All the computer technology in the world won't make us forget."[762] Five years later, however, computer technology was being used to force us to remember,

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that associates this picture with news discourses celebrating individual passengers' discipline and heroism under unimaginable circumstances." Narine, "Global Trauma," 222.

[761] Randy McMullen, "9/11 and the Arts: Five Years Later," *Contra Costa Times*, September 10, 2006, Features section. LexisNexis. Of course, *Zoolander* wasn't the only film to have images of the World Trade Center removed (the John Cusack and Kate Beckinsale romantic comedy *Serendipity* is another), but it was the first and will act as my touchstone for this discussion.

[762] Mary F. Pols, "Don't Erase Towers or Our Memories," *Contra Costa Times*, October 5, 2001, Entertainment News section. LexisNexis.

to make the audience not only see the towers that no longer existed, but to witness their dramatized destruction all over again.

As if to provide emphasis to this point, an early sequence provides the audience with a short conversation between Dominick and another New York commuter as they stand together in a crowded subway car. As Dominick reads the sports section of the newspaper, the other passenger asks him if he saw "Jeter's home run last night."[763] Dominick nods and informs the man that not only did he see it, he was actually at the game and saw it live. The commuter says, "That musta been nice," to which Dominick replies, "It was." This seemingly innocuous exchange is substantially deeper when one juxtaposes it against "reality." The game itself was supposed to be a dramatic event. More than 50,000 people were expected to show up at Yankee Stadium to witness Yankees pitcher Roger Clemens try for his 20th win of the season against the arch-rival Boston Red Sox, the team who had cut Clemens five years earlier for being "washed up, over the hill, [and with] his best pitching days behind him."[764] The reality, however, was that the game never happened; it was ultimately cancelled due to weather. "It was set up nicely for [Clemens]," said disappointed Yankees' manager Joe Torre. "It would have been great theatre."[765] As it turns out, it still was great theatre. Dominick Pezzulo was not only at the game that never was, but he witnessed Yankees' captain Derek Jeter hit a game winning home run. What "really" happened pales in relation to the "story" of what happened and, as the social body tells and re-tells these stories, we begin to write and calcify our history. For the administration and the majority of the MNOs, rhetorical

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[763] Derek Jeter was the captain and starting shortstop for the New York Yankees at the time.
[764] Richard Lessner, "Curse of the Bambino," *The Union Leader*, August 11, 1997, Editorial section. LexisNexis. To be clear, this is not Lessner's belief regarding Clemens, but how he characterized Boston's view.
[765] George King, "Rain Postpones Rocket's Record Chase," *The New York Post*, September 11, 2001, Sports section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

reality is understood through the prism of the Nine-Eleven master narrative. Through this prism, the events at Abu Ghraib don't deserve attention because they were merely an attempt by the State to provide security to all Americans and to exact the necessary revenge against those who brought pain to the nation.

In the face of trauma, it is not uncommon for subjects to deploy defense mechanisms that have been successful in the past, and ignoring traumatic events are often used as a first line of psychical defense. Further, in times national crisis like Nine-Eleven, the State can create what Agamben terms a "state of exception" where people surrender their political agency to the state for protection and a call for revenge. The power gained by the State through the state of exception is often maintained by invoking the memory of what LaCapra terms a "founding trauma" – what psychoanalysis calls negative sublimity. For their part, the Nine-Eleven films not only contribute to the founding trauma of the Nine-Eleven narrative by memorializing the event, they also provide a rhetorical justification for revenge. These fictional accounts carry rhetorical weight because not only can they gesture toward the potential of a melancholic society, the fictions that we tell through film can become part of the national memory. Now that we understand the dangers of ignoring traumatic events like Abu Ghraib, let's turn our attention toward the films that most directly address Abu Ghraib as an event.

THE TESTIMONIAL FILMS

Although there have been several "investigative reports" and television exposés on the Abu Ghraib scandal, the two documentaries analyzed in the previous chapter "turned the daily grind of a 21st-century war into criminal arguments so strong, they should have woken a sense of moral outrage in the masses."[766] Rory Kennedy, the

[766] Katherine Monk, "Our World Through the Eyes of Soldiers," *Edmonton Journal*, September 26, 2008, Movies section, Final edition. LexisNexis. It should be noted that Monk cites a third documentary, Alex

director of *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, was asked why she decided to tackle the Abu Ghraib scandal. She responded that her original intent was not to focus on the scandal itself, but to explore "the psychology of the perpetrators, and why they were motivated to do what they did."[767] That focus, however, changed into an investigation of the "administration's apparent willingness to condone and even encourage torture" when she began interviewing the soldiers who were stationed inside the prison and "one after the other they said, 'I did it because I was told to do it.'"[768] For Errol Morris, the director of *Standard Operating Procedure*, his motivation was born from his frustration with the administration's official explanation.[769] He said he was "really angry" with " the way there has been scapegoating since the beginning. All the anger has been directed at the few bad apples."[770] The result was a film that deftly threaded together a narrative that seeks to leave the audience not only furious with the administration, but more sympathetic to the soldiers themselves. Donald Clarke notes that the film "invites us to draw the conclusion that the soldiers were acting as they were expected to act by their superiors."[771] Katherine Monk says that although Morris never directly accuses the administration of endorsing torture, "he certainly lays the groundwork for a potential trial

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Gibney's *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007), alongside *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* and *Standard Operating Procedure*. Ultimately, I did not analyze *Taxi* because, although it did examine the impact of U.S. torture policy, it went beyond the Abu Ghraib scandal. For example, the taxi driver from which the film derives its title was an Afghani man tortured and killed at Bagram Air Base. The focus of this project is on the trauma of Abu Ghraib specifically, and although there is a tangential connection of this documentary, I chose to limit my focus to those films that also limited their focus to Abu Ghraib.

[767] Rory Kennedy, "How to Understand People," quoted in Stuart Jeffries, *The Guardian*, March 7, 2009, Magazine Supplement section. LexisNexis.

[768] Withey, "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib," LexisNexis. In a different interview, Kennedy said, "when I asked each of them why they committed these acts, they all said the exact same thing: 'I did it because I was told to do it.'" Kennedy, "How to Understand People," LexisNexis.

[769] I believe that this provides additional evidence that these films act as a counter-narrative.

[770] Errol Morris, "Ghraib Digger," quoted in Donald Clarke, *The Irish Times*, August 22, 2008, Film Features section. LexisNexis.

[771] Donald Clarke, "Standard Operating Procedure," *The Irish Times*, August 29, 2008, Film Reviews section. LexisNexis.

in The Hague by showing us how such demeaning treatment was labeled 'standard operating procedure.'"[772] She concludes that, "what happened at Abu Ghraib wasn't random torture by a bunch of redneck patriots … [but] part of a larger plan hatched by senior officials in the American administration to intimidate, humiliate and finally break the so-called enemy."[773] From the reviews of the Testimonial films, and from the words of the directors themselves, the evidence suggests that these documentaries sought not only to prove that these soldiers were merely "following orders in a situation where everything resembling civility and humanity seemed out of order," but to admonish those orders (and those who issued them) in an effort to find redemption through the exorcism of our traumatic ghosts. For Dan Webster, we must determine who "was supervising this hellish place called Abu Ghraib" and "forget the bad eggs. It seems all too likely that there are a few mother hens who have yet to be named."[774]

The Nine-Eleven films invoke the memory of a national tragedy, while the Testimonial films attempt to incorporate the story of Abu Ghraib into the national history.[775] In a psychoanalytic context, the incorporation of something that unsettles a master narrative can be said to do so in two ways: to remember (*erinnern*) and to act out

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[772] Katherine Monk, "'Standard Operating Procedure' Explores Roots of Torture at Abu Ghraib," *Canwest News Service*, May 8, 2008. LexisNexis.

[773] Monk, "Roots of Torture," LexisNexis.

[774] Dan Webster, "Documentaries Show Another Side of Abu Ghraib Story," *The Spokesman-Review*, July 4, 2008, Entertainment News section. LexisNexis.

[775] This might speak to the assumption of "truth" inherent in the documentary film. Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro write, "As viewers, we are affected by documentaries' claims of truth but seldom notice it. Many spectators enter the theater with a naïve concept of 'truth' and 'reality.' They see documentaries as innocent sources of information." Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 4. Providing evidence for this assumption in relation to the horror movies that will be discussed in the next section, Katie Rich and Josh Tyler argue that some documentaries are more frightening than horror films because documentaries are "not just a movie, but real life." Katey Rich and Josh Tyler, "Truth is Scarier Than Fiction: 5 Documentaries That Will Scare You to Death," Cinema Blend, October 30, 2008, accessed August 18, 2012, http://www.cinemablend.com/new/Truth-Is-Scarier-Than-Fiction-5-Documentaries-That-Will-Scare-You-To-Death-10729.html, par. 1.

(*agieren*).[776] Acting out occurs when recollection fails and is often a by-product of the compulsion to repeat.[777] When looking at how films (documentary films in particular) handle a traumatic event, Antonio Traverso similarly argues that there can be different approaches: films that "tend towards the production of re-enactments of the trauma" provide examples of cinematic acting-out, while films that hope to work-through "would tend towards thought and *distantiation* mechanisms – through reflective engagement with memories, fantasies, silences, and desires."[778] He argues that documentaries like the Testimonial films, which feature dramatizations and confessional interviews, often "tend to perform or act out traumatic memories."[779] A possible explanation for such acting out can be found if we look more closely at the recurring theme of haunting, both by the event and the residual images. The rhetorically constituted audience is offered the opportunity to exorcise those ghosts if we will only listen to the stories and understand the haunted experience of the soldiers from Abu Ghraib. As Dominick LaCapra explains, such an offer subjects the audience "to possession by haunting objects and to compulsively repeated incursions of traumatic residues" in hopes of creating an authentic traumatic experience, which reduces the strategy to acting out.[780]

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[776] LaPlanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 4.
[777] Freud, "Remembering."
[778] Antonio Traverso, "Dictatorship Memories: Working Through Trauma in Chilean Post-Dictatorship Documentary," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24 (2010): 181. EBSCOhost (47760488).
[779] Traverso, "Dictatorship Memories," 181. Traverso does not reference the Testimonial films specifically, but does describe elements that are dominant themes in both films. For example, dramatizations and re-creations are ubiquitous in both films. In *Standard Operating Procedure*, there are multiple instances of dramatizations framed in an extreme close-up that suggest reality. At the 30 minute-mark, Ken describes prisoners being hooded and forced to crawl along the floor while the film shows a re-creation of that event. At the 43 minute-mark, Harman describes removing the wires from "Gilligan" while the film displays a dramatization of wires being removed from someone's fingers. In *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, dramatizations are less frequent, but the film repeatedly inserts real footage that is completely disconnected from the event being described. For example, at the 12:30 minute-mark, Javal is talking about his deployment to Iraq and footage is inserted of troops in a firefight. Although this footage is "real" stock footage of actual battlefield encounters in Iraq, the sequence is not of Javal or his platoon.
[780] Dominick LaCapra, "Lanzmann's 'Shoah:' 'Here There Is No Why'," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997): 239-240.

The two cinematic tactics that suggest the Testimonial films are exercises in acting out consist in the illusion of telling the "whole" story and the misidentification of the traumatized victim. First, through their attempt to challenge the dominant narrative of the administration, the Testimonial films offer audiences an alternative story, one that can be "a story dedicated to filling in gaps, reaching some sort of closure."[781] The films, however, only act to tell another deceptively totalizing story, one that hopes to "fill in the gaps" of the dominant narrative, but equally blind to its own incompleteness. According to Roxana Waterson, the "danger is that audiences" accept the films as true, "literal 'history,' rather than a selective rendition of it."[782] For her, these films can never be anything but acting out because they stand in the place of recollection. The "interviews and reminiscences" of testimonial documentaries like the Testimonial films "are not 'memory itself,' but secondary representations" which "obliquely 'stand for the memory of themselves.'"[783] It is, of course, possible for the audience to recognize that these films only act to replace one incomplete narrative with another, but that recognition does little to rectify the problem. According to LaCapra, such realizations only point to a "witnessing the impossibility of witnessing" which can become such "an all-consuming process" for the audience that it "forecloses the possibility of working through" the traumatic event.[784]

Second, the Testimonial films misidentify the traumatized victim. When dealing with traumatizing events, testimonial documentaries allow the witnesses to trauma to rework their relation to the event and "their position in relation to a community of others

[781] LaCapra, "Lanzmann's 'Shoah'," 241.
[782] Waterson, "Trajectories of Memory," 53.
[783] Waterson, "Trajectories of Memory," 53.
[784] LaCapra, "Lanzmann's 'Shoah'," 247-248.

who similarly suffer and seek release."[785] With this insight, it becomes readily apparent how the films view the traumatic event and who the victim is. In the Testimonial films, the traumatic event was the stain the nation endured by the actions of the administration and the victims of that trauma were the soldiers who were ordered to torture and the American national body. The subjects of a testimonial documentary are the ones who are given a voice and are "the most intimate manifestation of the survivor-witness relationship and the product of intercalated institutions and practices."[786] The running time of both films is dominated by the stories of the soldiers who were deployed to Abu Ghraib and to the "experts" who give context to their testimony. The prisoners themselves are given no screen time in *Standard Operating Procedure* and less than five minutes in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*.[787] As such, the Testimonial films challenge the administration's dismissal that torture occurred at Abu Ghraib, but never engage the horror of torture. They acknowledge Abu Ghraib constituted torture, but sidestep the larger question by framing the traumatic event not as the torture itself, but as the impact

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[785] Antonio Traverso, "Working-Through Trauma in Post-Dictatorial Chilean Documentary: Lorena Giachino's 'Reinalda del Carmen'," in *People, Place and Power: Regional and International Perspectives*, eds. Dawn Bennett, Jaya Earnest, and Mitume Tanji (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2009), 275.

[786] Sarkar and Walker, "Introduction," 5.

[787] A few former prisoners are given screen time in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, but the way these testimonies are framed is telling. While virtually all of the soldier and expert testimonies are presented in the traditional documentary format that centers the subject in the frame from the shoulders up, the prisoners are framed in an extreme close-up such that the audience is never allowed to see the prisoner's whole face. For example, at the 14:15 minute-mark, "Mohammed Talal" relates his experience during the "village sweeps" and "mass arrests" the U.S. military carried out. He is framed such that the audience sees only his mouth or through a skewed overhead shot which shows us only the top of his head and his profile. Unlike the other subjects, Talal is never allowed to make "eye contact" with the audience or connect with the spectator in any way. Further, virtually all of the testimonies by former prisoners exist only to provide confirmation of a story told by a soldier and not as a personal account that would ask the audience to bear witness to the horror of torture. The few testimonies that are present in *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* seem to be there only as a means to an end, as a catalyst to the audience's identification with the soldiers.

the torture had on the soldiers and the nation.[788] The question persists, however, as to what impact acting out has on the audience.

According to Lacan, Freud's interpretation of acting out is limited by his failure to understand the behavior intersubjectively. For Lacan, remembering "does not merely involve recalling something to consciousness, but also communicating this to an Other," through signification.[789] Lacan contends that acting out "occurs when you symbolize prematurely, when you address something in the order of reality and not within the symbolic register."[790] It is this intersubjective failure of signification that, for Lacan, binds acting out to Freud's theory of condemning judgment (*verwerfung*).[791] Put simply,

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[788] Even if one agrees that the locus of trauma is in how it impacted the soldiers and the nation, the Testimonial films still hold limited therapeutic potential in that they are examples of the soldiers acting out. In his discussion of psychoanalytic technique, Arnold Bernstein notes that there is a clinical rule against acting out. He argues that the goal of the therapeutic endeavor should be to become ""conscious of impulses that [we] are translating into action instead of words, and to divert into the work of recollection those [we] would discharge in action." Arnold Bernstein, "The Classical Paramenters of Psychoanalytic Technique: A Review," *Modern Psychoanalysis* 26 (2001): 150. EBSCOhost (8959131). Further, LaCapra argues that the films of an effective therapeutic strategy should "reactivate and transmit not trauma but unsettlement" and act as "at most an index trauma" instead of a "full identification with the victim." LaCapra, "Lanzmann's 'Shoah'," 267. It is only through this index of trauma that an audience might hope to work-through and draft a blueprint for the future. LaCapra argues that the attempt to have the soldiers tell the story beyond the frame of the photographs limits their "performativity to acting-out and tends even to give way to a displaced, secular religiosity in which authenticity becomes tantamount to a movement beyond secondary witnessing to a full identification with the victim. This full identification would allow one not only to act out the trauma vicariously in the self as surrogate victim but cause one to insist on having the victim relive traumatizing events, thus concealing one's own intrusiveness." LaCapra, "Lanzmann's 'Shoah'," 245.

[789] Evans, *Introductory Dictionary*, 3.

[790] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar III: The Psychoses*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 80.

[791] Psychoanalysis tells us that the symptom of trauma manifests itself as the compulsion to repeat. For Freud, there are three potential ways in which a subject may break the cycle of repetition (sublimation, condemning judgment, and engagement with the pathogenic wish), each of which connects to one of the three rhetorical strategies outlined in this project. See Sigmund Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 27. For Lacan, the failure of signification in acting out is a manifestation of condemning judgment. He argues that condemning judgment "cut[s] short any manifestation of the symbolic order – that is, it cut short the *Bejahung* that Freud posits as the primary procedure in which the judgment of attribution finds its root, and which is no other than the primordial condition for something from the real to come to offer itself up to the revelation of being." Lacan, "Response to Hyppolite's," 323.

acting out occurs when words fail – and words fail when one condemns. As such, blaming the administration for the torture is what Freud would consider "a successful modification of repression."[792] For Edward Bibring, this modification would be what he termed "working-off," the mechanisms that "dissolve the [traumatic] tension gradually by changing the internal conditions which give rise to it."[793] Daniel Lagache concludes that the traumatized subject may act to replace repression with the mechanisms of working-off by distancing him or herself from the traumatic memory and reorienting that memory toward an object.[794] Contextualizing this to Abu Ghraib, Mark Danner notes that the torture pictures represent a "peculiarly contemporary kind of scandal" in that it is "not about uncovering what is hidden, [but] about seeing what is already there – and acting on it."[795] The focus, however, is not on the act of torture, but our orientation in relation to it. The victims are not those who were tortured, but those who were ordered to do so. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this shift in focus represents a process of working-off as opposed to working-through the trauma. What is left unexamined in working-off is "the most disturbing aspect of the Abu Ghraib photos: the smile of the faces of the torturers."[796] For Hilary Neroni, shifting the traumatic locus away from the act of torture can never explain this "kernel of nonsense" that "acts as a distortion or stain in the images" that haunt us.[797] Working-off can merely offer to exorcise the ghosts of Abu

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[792] LaPlanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 81.
[793] Edward Bibring, Qtd. in Jean LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 487. Kelly Oliver explains the function of working-off as creating a "reality of overcoming the repetition compulsion and breaking the cycle of repetition by changing the very conditions that make repetition possible." Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 77.
[794] Daniel Lagache, *The Work of Daniel Lagache: Selected Papers 1938-1964*, trans. Eva Rosenblum (London: Karnac Books, 1993).
[795] Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004), xiv.
[796] Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile," 246.
[797] Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile," 246.

Ghraib without asking if exorcism should be the goal, or if we should seek to "offer [the ghost] a hospitable reception" because "haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation."[798] For some, the refusal to interrogate the act of torture and the uncanny smile of the torturer denies any hope of true reconciliation.

On the surface, it appears as though these films directly engage the issue of torture at Abu Ghraib, but a more detailed examination suggests otherwise. Again, the actual victims of torture are displaced by a focus on the U.S. soldiers who tortured them Films that attempt to bring a traumatic event into the national memory by dramatizing the event and "tell the whole story," as the Testimonial films do, engage in a process of acting-out. Through this acting-out, the film misidentifies the victim as the soldiers who were put in a horrifying situation; the story is told through their voices and the audience is asked to identify with the soldiers in place of the prisoners. This acting-out leads to what Bibring terms "working-off," where the traumatic tension is dissolved and displaced onto another. The audience of the Testimonial films is able to resolve the trauma of Abu Ghraib by moving blame from the soldiers (or themselves if they feel personally complicit) to the Bush administration. While working-off does integrate the traumatic event into the Symbolic and short-circuit the compulsion to repeat, one cannot say that the trauma was truly worked-through without an engagement of torture proper. With that in mind, let's turn our attention now to the set of films that makes torture a central part of their narrative.

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[798] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 207-208. *Emphasis in original*.

TORTURE PORN

From a psychoanalytic perspective, although torture porn films contain many of the same patterns and themes as the other films, much of the time, these patterns and themes are inverted – the missing body becomes the horror of the reappearing body and cultural norms such as the exchange paradigm become perverted. The question becomes, then, if these inversions represent an attempt to constitute a subject who may work-through the trauma of Abu Ghraib.[799] In his book, *Abu Ghraib: Reflections in the*

[799] Working-through is a more complicated process than simply bringing the event into the Symbolic register and includes navigating a tenuous relationship between fantasy, desire and *jouissance*. Although the remainder of this chapter will look at this relationship in more detail, a summary of these concepts could be helpful. When politics is functioning smoothly, a rhetorical subject is called into being that is reflective of the master narratives and lines up with the stories of the individual. In times of social trauma, however, the master narrative no longer adequately describes the world. The rhetorical strategies that compete to replace (or explain) the challenged master narrative structure themselves around desire and the lost enjoyment derived by the Other's prohibition against *jouissance*. These new narratives promise "the delivery of the 'good life' … a future state in which the current limitations thwarting our enjoyment will be overcome." Glynos and Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity," 261. In Freudian terms, this is the offer to go beyond the pleasure principle. In Lacanian terms, it is the promise to satiate desire. For the Bush administration, "the good life" was denied to us by an enemy who waged an unprovoked attack against the American public and refused to "play by the rules" of the Geneva Convention. For those who criticized the administration's policies, "the good life" was denied to us by an administration that cared more about maintaining its power than it did about the reputation of the nation. In both of these strategies, "the good life" is denied to us by an external Other who bears the brunt of our aggression. As Jason Glynos explains, these rhetorical strategies interact with our fantasy constructions by holding out the promise of fulfilling desire, but naming an obstacle that stands in the way. He writes, "This narrative structure will have a range of features which will vary from context to context, of course, but one crucial element is the obstacle preventing the realization of one's fantasmatic desire. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, realizing one's fantasy is impossible because the subject (as a subject of desire) survives only insofar as its desire remains unsatisfied. But the obstacle, which often comes in the form of a prohibition or a threatening Other, transforms this impossibility into a 'mere difficulty', thus creating the impression that its realization is at least potentially possible. Fantasy, therefore, is not merely a narrative with its potentially infinite variations at the level of content, although it is of course this too. It also has a certain logic in which the subject's very being is implicated." Jason Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13 (2008): 283. EBSCOhost (34716598). The inherent risk is that the subject constituted by these rhetorical positions has yet to work-through the trauma, which can lead to demands of retribution against the Other. The question, then, is how a rhetorical strategy might constitute a subject able to work-through the trauma? For Žižek, the social body can work-through a trauma if it seeks to "traverse the fundamental fantasy," and accept "the fact that *there is no secret treasure in me*, that the support of me (the subject) is purely phantasmic." Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 10. This traversal constitutes a conscious understanding by the subject that all narratives are always-already incomplete and promises of *jouissance* are only partial, functioning to maintain the pursuit of desire. For Žižek, working-through requires a confrontation with the vanishing mediator, which "effectively means acknowledging our potential for diabolical evil." Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction*

Looking Glass, Michael Cannon tells a story centered on the trial of the Butcher of Auschwitz, Adolph Eichman. During the trial, Eichman was identified by a Jewish survivor who broke down in tears after doing so. When asked if he still feared Eichman, the survivor replied that he did not fear the man, but the commonplace potential of evil. In his mind, he had built Eichman up into a monster, a figure that was larger than life, but now the survivor saw him as he truly was – a mere human capable of tremendous evil. The survivor said he wept because he realized that human nature allows for anyone to be capable of such evil, and that was the core of our collective shame. Cannon wonders if the trauma of Abu Ghraib was not also our realization of that potential evil in all of us, and fears that we may have pushed the issue of torture aside so quickly that we would no longer weep in Eichman's presence. He writes,

> Americans have expressed a collective sense of shame over Abu Ghraib. We cannot deny that a tragedy occurred there. Unfortunately, before we closed the book on Abu Ghraib, we did not take the opportunity to properly understand it. We cannot just move on without addressing the critical questions Abu Ghraib has brought to the surface.[800]

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 122. As Glynos and Stavrakakis note, this cultural narrative works to fuel desire and "reinscribes lack in the subjective economy, the lack of another *jouissance*, thereby reproducing the fantasmic promise of – and desire for – its recapture." Glynos and Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity," 262. For Lacan, the subject who traverses the fantasy "is thus brought back to the plane at which, from the reality of the unconscious, the drive may be made present." Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 274. In late Lacan, he correlates traversing the fantasy to the subject's fundamental identification with the *sinthome*, the ring that holds together the Borromean knot of the three registers of existence. This traversal, or identification, takes place in the upper section of the graph of desire, specifically the left to right vector of *jouissance* → castration. Here the subject may pursue "satisfaction without holding the Other responsible for it and without granting the Other the preeminent status being the only one who can provide it." Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 127. Also see Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject." Thus, the social body that appropriately works-through a cultural trauma is one that doesn't seek satisfaction from the Other (which is the activating moment of aggression in the Bush administration's state of exception) or replace the self with an object in the traumatic memory (which is the object cause of fear in the abjection represented in the Testimonial films), but finds satisfaction even in the face of castration (which is the necessary step to avoid melancholia by engaging the horror of torture).

[800] Michael E. Cannon, *Abu Ghraib: Reflections in the Looking Glass* (Camarillo: Xulon Press, 2005), 118.

Jasbir K. Puar argues that it is foolish to assume that an American, just because of his or her nationality, could "never enjoy the infliction of such abuse" and that the refusal to realize our own potential for horror reinscribes a conglomeration of power "intrinsic to U.S. patriotism."[801] For Neroni, the smile that graces the face of the American torturer in the Abu Ghraib photographs ruptures that myth and marks "the enjoyment that erupts at this point of rupture."[802] For Kristeva, this enjoyment is the site of *jouissance*.[803]

The *jouissance* of abjection is a paradox – we are continually drawn to it and repulsed by it. For Kristeva, "*jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully. A passion."[804] We are unable to look away or even to remove ourselves from it. It is not just our sickening desire to stare at an automobile accident as we drive by, but the darkest part of our being that wants to be a part of the savage spectacle. Freud argued that humans are endowed with "a powerful share of aggressiveness" and sees their neighbor as "someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him [sic]" and "to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him."[805] The recognition and acceptance of this grotesque desire can help us "understan[d] why so many victims of the

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[801] Jasbir K. Puar, "On Torture: Abu Ghraib," *Radical History Review* (2005): 14. EBSCOhost (18139474).

[802] Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile," 247. The photographs themselves acted as both the return of the repressed and the traumatizing reappearing body. As Strauss explained, "the Abu Ghraib images were *unconsciously* made, and this gave them a special power. [These] images seemed to have welled up out of our own unconscious, showing us what we knew, but didn't know that we knew." Strauss, "Breakdown in the Gray Room," 98.

[803] *Jouissance* is most easily understood as painful pleasure or the pain one experiences through an overload of pleasure and "nicely expresses the paradoxical satisfaction that the subject derives from his symptom." Evans, *Introductory Dictionary*, 92.

[804] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

[805] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 68-69. It is this very passage that leads Lacan to conclude that "*jouissance* is evil … This may shock you, upset certain habits, cause consternation among the happy souls. But it can't be helped." Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 184.

abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones."[806] Ultimately, it is the interaction of *jouissance* with desire and our cultural fantasy that helps explain the limited psychotherapeutic potential of negative sublimity and working-off.[807] Kristeva argues that, "enjoyment cannot be reduced to the signifier. Enjoyment resists all attempts to define it because it exists in the gaps of signification, at the points where signification fails."[808] The orienting rhetorical positions available in both the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films either ignored the torturers' smiles, leaving a permanent traumatic stain on the images, or they attempted to explain them not as enjoyment, but as habit.[809] For subjects hoping to confront the horror of torture, however, these attempts may ring hollow as they hope to finally comprehend what it means to be engulfed by such horrifying enjoyment. Kristeva writes,

> Though exposing the facts of torture might shock and horrify the American populace, it will not uncover the entirety of the stakes involved because … [one] cannot unlock the power of this enjoyment by exposing the facts; one must, instead, force the enjoyment into the light of day, where it lacks any air to breathe.[810]

It is only through exposing that enjoyment and accepting the reality of *jouissance*, as it relates to our desire, that we might understand both the contradiction and power of

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[806] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9. This understanding can also help us understand the immediate appeal of torture porn films as they allow us to joy in the abjection of torture without permanent damage.
[807] For Žižek, this paradox is firmly entrenched in our cultural understandings. He writes, "The boundary that separates beauty from disgust is for that reason far more unstable than it may seem, since it is always contingent on a specific cultural space: the 'anamorphic' torture of the body which can exert such fascination within some cultural spaces … can evoke nothing but disgust in a foreign gaze." Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 140.
[808] Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile," 256.
[809] For example, in *Standard Operating Procedure*, Harman claims that she smiled over the corpse of the dead Iraqi only because that's what she always did in pictures.
[810] Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile," 256.

abjection. For Raz Yosef, this means that how the social body chooses to narrate a traumatic event "carries an ethical responsibility."[811]

In the War on Terror, the missing body can be represented by the figurative, and oftentimes literal, disappearance of the tortured body. After the often widely publicized capture (to make the public feel physically secure), the bodies of prisoners then "disappear to torture chambers in [other countries] or to a network of CIA 'black sites' for 'enhanced interrogation.'"[812] The photographs shattered any hopes of a "plausible deniability" regarding torture for the American public and the theme of disappearing prisoners became more and more common among the testimonies of those most intimately impacted by the War on Terror.[813] For some, this manifestation of the missing body theme not only laid bare the inhumanity of torture, but also exposed "one of the conditions upon which the legitimacy of modern state punishment, both carceral and capital, largely depends."[814] Under this reading of the missing body, the Abu Ghraib photographs act as an inversion of wish fulfillment. On September 11, thousands of people traumatically "disappeared" and millions more hoped that they would reappear. When they didn't, they were declared "missing" and efforts were re-doubled to recover the bodies so that they could be returned to grieving families in hopes that such a return might suture the psychical wound.

The dream of the recovered, or returned, body is perverted, however, in the context of Abu Ghraib. In the War on Terror, thousands of prisoners disappeared into

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[811] Raz Yosef, "Recycled Wounds: Trauma, Gender, and Ethnicity in Keren Yedaya's Or, My Treasure," *Camera Obscura* 24 (2009): 65. EBSCOhost (45389317).
[812] Derek Gregory, "The Black Flag: Guantanamo Bay and the Space of Exception," *Geografiska Annaler Series B: Human Geography* 88 (2006): 419. EBSCOhost (23408283).
[813] For a compilation of testimonies from prisoners, see Rachel Meeropol, ed. *America's Disappeared: Secret Imprisonment, Detainees, and the 'War on Terror'* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005).
[814] David Garland, "The Problem of the Body in Modern State Punishment," *Social Research* 78 (2011): 790. EBSCOhost (67182023).

black sites where the American public assured themselves that justice was fairly meted out. Through the Abu Ghraib photographs, however, these missing bodies were returned and many Americans found themselves not only witnessing the abjection written upon those bodies, but questioning their personal role in the horror. For Foucault, this curse of the returned body exposes the inner workings of "the disciplinary mechanisms [that] can be read [through] the haunting memory of 'contagions,' of … people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder."[815] For some, reckoning with the torture means exposing one's self to the naked horror torture represents, and, in the case of Abu Ghraib, it manifests itself as the uniform application of an expressed demand: the recovery and display of the missing body. In the darkened torture dungeons of the "nowhere place of Abu Ghraib," *homo sacer* is born into the state of emergency, "the site of the Real where bodies have been reduced to the status of dehumanized material, a body of instincts rather than of drives and desires."[816]

For Žižek, the torture at Abu Ghraib was an initiation into American culture and illuminated the ubiquity of accepted horror in American culture. Acting as the physical manifestation of American *jouissance*, the Abu Ghraib photographs provide us "a direct insight into American values, into the very core of the obscene enjoyment that sustains the U.S. way of life."[817] Ultimately, the Abu Ghraib photographs act as "staged trophy

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[815] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 198.

[816] Jagodzinski, "Trauma of the Image," par. 4.

[817] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 176. Although not intending to make the same argument as Žižek, ABC News reporter Geoff Thompson provides additional evidence for Žižek's claim. He interviewed former U.S. Marine Patrick Payne in 2008 and commented on his nonchalant, almost dismissive, attitude toward the torture at Abu Ghraib. Noting Payne's demotion for "hazing" a subordinate, Thompson said, "That may go some way to explaining Patrick Payne's attitude to the notorious abuse of prisoners at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison." It doesn't seem to be that far of a logical jump for Thompson to go from hazing a subordinate to prisoner torture. Geoff Thompson, "US Marks Iraq War, Five Years On," *ABC Transcripts*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (May 6, 2008). LexisNexis.

shots" not only for the soldiers who snapped them, but for the culture at large.[818] Of the nearly 2,000 pictures that were recovered from Abu Ghraib, the ones that have generated the most visceral reaction all have similar characteristics. Morris examined all of the photographs and separated them into three categories – the vérité (pictures of natural surroundings and events), the posed (pictures where Americans put themselves into those surroundings), and the tableaux-evolved (pictures where the surroundings are theatrically arranged for the photograph).[819] Of these pictures, the tableaux–evolved photographs were the ones that "reflected the attendant and commonplace reality of torture."[820]

Art historian Stephen Eisenman likens the Abu Ghraib pictures to the old lynching photographs of the American South. The Abu Ghraib pictures' "emphasis on theatricality and display," he argues "puts them squarely into the art-historical and mass culture tradition" of lynching photographs.[821] For Eisenman, the aesthetic patterns in the Abu Ghraib photographs "contain peculiar motifs and subjects" which originate "in the sculpture of Greco-Roman antiquity, and reappear with regularity in much, subsequent Western art."[822] He contends that these "images of torture, power and domination are passed down from one generation to the next," such that they "come to be widely embedded in both visual memory and the physical body" to be "used by sovereign, imperial powers" to control their populations.[823] The structure of this theatrical presentation encapsulated by the pictures "also structure[s] the vision of a considerable

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[818] Gourevitch and Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure*, 179. For Gourevitch and Morris, the reality of Abu Ghraib was so far removed from "reality" that the soldiers "felt that the only way to create an image that would do justice to the sheer lunacy of their experience at Abu Ghraib was by exaggeration and artifice." Gourevitch and Morris, *Standard Operating Procedure*, 196.
[819] Errol Morris, "SeenUnseen," quoted in Jody Seaborn, *Austin American-Statesman*, June 1, 2008, Insight section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[820] Groen, "Outside the Frame," LexisNexis.
[821] Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 101.
[822] Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, 9-10.
[823] Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, 15.

portion of the US public, rendering them largely mute before the spectacle of officially sanctioned torture at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere."[824] Dora Apel, who also likens the Abu Ghraib pictures to lynching photographs, argues that the theatrics displayed in the pictures reveal that the perpetrators "believe they are committing their deeds for the good of the nation or, at the least, that their acts are sanctioned by a larger community."[825] She concludes that, "the exercise of such sadism and humiliation is a fundamentally political act. The viewer is meant to identify with the proud torturers in the context of the defense of a political and cultural hierarchy."[826] In light of our personal attraction toward the abject, and the American cultural tendency towards "acceptable horror," Chi-Dooh Li Pi worries that our efforts towards retribution may turn the American subject into that which we hate. She writes,

> each one of us is capable of perpetuating directly, participating indirectly or acquiescing willingly in not just evil, but evil of unimaginable proportions. It is in this truth that raises the very difficult dilemma of how we can fight evil without

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[824] Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, 111.

[825] Dora Apel, "Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib," *Art Journal* 64 (2005): 89. EBSCOhost (17614699).

[826] Apel, "Torture Culture," 89. For some scholars, this behavior points to a type of "national groupthink" where a culture "is so ingrained in its members that ideas foreign to [that culture] go unexpressed." Carl P. Mann, "How to Remove Groupthink from Executive Decision-Making," *Public Relations Quarterly* 31 (1986): 29. EBSCOhost (4471778). This calcification of thought results in a failure to examine other alternatives, a failure to examine the group's assumptions, and a failure to examine the credibility of arguments in the public sphere. Irving Janis argues that groupthink can have a socio-political character as well and offers up examples such as America's refusal to accept the coming attack on Pearl Harbor, the assumption of success in the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the miscalculation of North Vietnam's response to an escalated war. See Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972). This groupthink doesn't remove the traumatic impact of the torture, but did serve to give it meaning for those involved. The political story being told inside Abu Ghraib – that the torture of the detainees was necessary to save American lives – became so pervasive that there was "growing closure and resistance to opinions that contest the dominant received wisdom about the causes for and meaning of the traumatic event." Vertzberger, "Antinomies," 868. Freud notes that in "a group every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his [sic] personal interest to the collective interest." Freud, *Group Psychology*, 10. This aspect of groupthink serves to explain why a social body can "develop cultures in which some individuals and groups knowingly commit unethical acts, or ignore them even though they believe the activities to be wrong." Ronald R. Sims, "Linking Groupthink to Unethical Behavior in Organizations," *Journal of Business Ethics* 11 (1992): 653. EBSCOhost.

> crossing a line and engaging in evil ourselves. … [Abu Ghraib] should serve as a bright, flashing neon warning sign that in our zeal to punish those who would inflict such horrors on us, we can easily fall into becoming more and more like the evildoers we pursue.[827]

It is not that the human animal must be evil, nor is it that s/he must behave in an evil way – it is that all of us have the potential for evil, though we often distract ourselves from this fact. For all of the evil in the world, few people actually perceive of themselves as evil, even when they call for the sacrifice to Lacan's dark god. As Žižek explains, the evil person does not set him or herself against good, but against the excess of evil. He or she hates evil with such a passion that they end up doing evil themselves in an attempt to purify the world; this is what Žižek terms the "way of the superego" and it "is precisely that of the sacrifice to the obscure gods of which Lacan speaks: the reassertion of the barbaric violence of the savage obscene law in order to fill in the gap of the failing symbolic law."[828] Because social trauma is marked by this failing symbolic law (the rupture of the master narrative) and all of us have the potential to enact evil through sacrifice, we are burdened with a moral obligation to seek out appropriate ways to work-through that trauma.

The events of Abu Ghraib, however, represent the zero point of abjection, the horrifying horizon that we cannot help but take joy in. Sergeant Ken Davis noted that none of the American soldiers at Abu Ghraib thought twice about taking pictures because none of them thought they were doing anything wrong. When we look at the photograph of Sabrina Harman, smiling over the corpse of a man who was literally tortured to death, it is a jarring experience. For Hilary Neroni, this "kernel of nonsense – the uncanny enjoyment at the centre of torture in these photos – acts as a distortion or stain in the

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[827] Chi-Dooh Li Pi, "Confronting Evil -- And Steering Clear of it Ourselves," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 31, 2004, Focus section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[828] Žižek, *Desert of the Real*, 142.

image."[829] This stain is the abjection of torture. Kristeva argues that the abject can emerge under the guise of noble action when the respect for law collapses. The satisfaction of revenge is not only a private narcissism, but a justification for what she terms the abjection of "arbitrary, exterminating power."[830] The abjection manifest in revenge, Kristeva contends, is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles" because it does the work of evil in the name of good.[831] Abu Ghraib suggests not only a cultural normalization of torture, but an enjoyment of evil, and that enjoyment manifests itself in our stories and artistic representations. As Peter Goddard explains, the pictures themselves have all the elements of "a cheap B-grade horror movie. … It's as if Graner and the rest of the picture-takers understood implicitly that they were in that awful place to play a role in this war fantasy."[832] Ziauddin Sardar writes,

> The institutionalization of torture by U.S. forces should not surprise us – the military proved what it is capable of in Vietnam and Cambodia. Recruits are trained to treat the enemy with contempt, to see him [sic] as less than human. Tough guys have got to do what years of cultural indoctrination have taught them – bend the enemy combatant to their will, if necessary by torture. This is the theme of countless 'hard man' films, from classic westerns to *Heartbreak Ridge* and *Missing in Action*. In such films, the heroes are licensed to use ruthless violence and brutality to make the land safe for their own.[833]

It is the torture porn film that breaks free from that pattern and offers a divergent moral understanding of torture. The horror film is almost wholly rooted in the time and place of its production and "the contemporary horror film has defined and illustrated the phobias of a 'new' world. … [M]ore than any other genre, it has interrogated the deep-seated

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[829] Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile," 246.
[830] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 19.
[831] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[832] Peter Goddard, "Images of Abu Ghraib," *The Toronto Star*, June 1, 2008, accessed November 8, 2011, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/Books/article/434839, par. 17-20.
[833] Ziauddin Sardar, "The Holiday Snaps," *New Statesman*, March 7, 2005. LexisNexis.

effects of change and responded to the newly determined grand narratives."[834] For example, the vengeful role reversal in torture porn directly addresses issues that the other films deftly side-step. At the 66 minute-mark in *Hostel*, Paxton hopes to escape by donning the rubber apron and horrifying mask of a factory customer, literally turning himself into what he hates. It is hardly surprising when, later in Act III, he seeks out vengeance against those who threatened him. Paxton's behavior provides the audience the opportunity to confront both the abjection of torture and their own capacity for evil. Critics of torture porn argue that the audience is denied the ability to identify with the victims, that the filmmakers are "far more interested in the depraved minds perpetuating the abuse than they are in the suffering of those poor, pretty ciphers at the receiving end. The consequence is zero emotional involvement."[835] For the subject constituted by torture porn, however, this is exactly the point. By reducing the victim to an object and then subjecting that object to horrifying damage, the torture porn film provides the audience an opportunity to safely engage their *jouissance* without shirking the abject character of the act itself.

Over the past decade, the depiction of torture has become more and more commonplace in American films and television, but its depiction varies wildly.[836]

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[834] Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre: From 'Beelzebub' to 'Blair Witch'* (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 3. Torture porn, in particular, "appears to be part of a fascination with the extreme" that is commonplace in "the 'permanent state of emergency' created in the wake of the War on Terror." Feona Attwood and Sharon Lockyer, "Controversial Images: An Introduction," *Popular Communication* 7 (2009): 4. EBSCOhost (35905528).

[835] Tim Robey, "It's Not Scary - Just Revolting," *The Daily Telegraph*, June 27, 2007, The Arts section. LexisNexis.

[836] The number of torture incidents aired on prime-time network TV shows from 2002-2007 was 897, up from the 110 of the previous seven years. "Harper's Index," Harper's Magazine, January, 2009, accessed May 12, 2012, www.harpers.org/archive/2009/01/0082319. Although this trend encompassed a variety of sources, one of the most popular examples, and the one that will serve as my point of comparison, is the hit Fox television show *24* in which Counter-Terrorist agent Jack Bauer thwarts a multitude of terrorist plots over the series' eight-season run. *24*, DVD, directed by Various (2001-2010; Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment). It is almost unquestionable that this show was part of the American zeitgeist following September 11. Film critic Chris Garcia called *24* "spectacular" and television critic

Although it is generally accepted that torture porn is intimately linked to the torture scandals, its relationship with them is a matter of debate.[837] Beth A. Kattelman contends that torture porn films "provide a new window into the original trauma. The current spate of extreme films has become popular because they reflect and refract the fears that have arisen from America's ongoing war on terror."[838] She concludes that these films "offer a *mise-en-scène* in which retribution is enacted," acting to justify the War on Terror and the use of torture as a geopolitical tool of the United States by providing audiences "a safe escape into a bloody-yet-contained world."[839] Richard Kim, on the other hand, argues that the mainstream representation of torture in television series like *24* "rationalizes torture as necessary to preserve not just US national security but law, authority and agency in general; it is a fantasy of absolute power."[840] Both Kattelman and Kim agree that power is bound to the question of torture's perceived legitimacy and believe that analyzing the form torture takes in popular culture "may cast light on why Americans are so seemingly nonchalant about torture's prevalence in the 'war on terror'[, helping] us understand why torture … took the particular form it did at Abu Ghraib."[841]

Alan Pergament argued that it was "one of the best shows on television, with the ability to astound the skeptics and top itself season after season by starting another major crisis." Chris Garcia, "Top 10 DVDs," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 27, 2002, Movies and More section. LexisNexis; Alan Pergament, "White Knuckle Ride," *Buffalo News*, January 12, 2006, Lifestyles section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[837] Lowenstein, "Spectacle Horror," 50.

[838] Beth A. Kattelman, "Carnographic Culture: America and the Rise of the Torture Porn Film," in *The Domination of Fear*, ed. Mikko Canini (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 11.

[839] Kattelman, "Carnographic Culture," 11.

[840] Richard Kim, "Pop Torture," *Nation*, December 26, 2005, 37. EBSCOhost (19097620).

[841] Kim, "Pop Torture," EBSCOhost,37. Sardar adds that it's not only the form, but the normalization of torture that have a direct impact on the reality of torture in the world. He writes, "There is a seamless connection between what happens in American society, the way society is represented by Hollywood, and the torture meted out by U.S. soldiers abroad. In movies, torture is an everyday activity. In *Man on Fire*, the Denzel Washington character casually tortures a gangster, chopping off his fingers and then taping a bomb to his posterior. Jack Bauer, the counter-terrorist agent in the TV series *24*, tortures indiscriminately, not caring whether his victims are suspected terrorists, colleagues or teenaged girls. The relationship between American society and Hollywood is like a feedback loop. The extremity of one reinforces the other." Sardar, "The Holiday Snaps," LexisNexis.

Torture becomes palatable to the public when popular culture makes it an accepted part of our foreign policy toolbox. Kim concludes that, "popular culture can aid and abet" the mainstream acceptance of torture by depicting "scenes of righteous agency" by legitimized power figures.[842] In a particularly harsh review of *Captivity*, Tony Wong draws this notion of righteous agency into sharp focus. After criticizing the film for asking us to "revel" in the "sick" abuse of the protagonist, Wong writes, "at some point you want Jack Bauer to burst in the door. 'I'll show you torture you amateur,' Bauer would say in a growly snarl. Then he'd kick ass. Now that's a movie."[843] There is a distinct difference between the "righteous agency" of Jack Bauer kicking ass and the "sick abuse" of torture porn. In the context of *24*, Bauer almost always derives his righteous agency from a "ticking bomb" scenario in which torture is used to extract information necessary to save innocent lives.[844] In the torture porn film, however, there is no righteousness connected to the torture, connected, as it is, to either to the enjoyment of the antagonist or the desire for revenge by the protagonist. For Lowenstein, torture porn refuses to allow its audience to ignore the ethics of torture and argues that the "American responsibility for torture is not washed away … the nation's hands are still dirty, in the literally bloody register of spectacle horror."[845] There is no pragmatic reason for the torture beyond cruelty. For Marcelo N. Viñar, "The lack of any reason or

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[842] Kim, "Pop Torture," EBSCOhost,39.

[843] Tony Wong, "Torture Porn for Popcorn Eaters Not Up to Snuff," *Toronto Star*, July 15, 2007, Entertainment section. EBSCOhost (6FP0189956375).

[844] The "ticking bomb" scenario is the subject of a heated debate regarding the place of ethics in pragmatic politics. For an example of both the "ticking bomb" scenario and subsequent debate see David Luban, "Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb," *Virginia Law Review* 91 (2005). In the context of the ticking bomb, arguers on both sides seem to jettison the notion of torture being a moral absolute and adopt a morally relative position rooted in questions of the efficiency and validity of information extracted via torture. Even when ethics are considered, they are done within a utilitarian calculus making morality relative to a pragmatic politics. This is fundamentally different from the position I argue the torture porn film takes, which is that torture is always morally suspect and a result of the intersection between fantasy and *jouissance*.

[845] Lowenstein, "Spectacle Horror," 55.

explanation for torture, the infinite and inescapable bodily pain combined with the arbitrariness and cruelty as central motives of psychic causality configure a traumatic nucleus of horrifying specificity."[846] It is when torture becomes bound with the political that working-through is delayed, perhaps indefinitely.[847] It is when torture is exposed as naked brutality that the subject is given an opportunity to confront it as abjection, which Kristeva argues is the necessary pre-requisite for working-through.[848]

Unlike *24*, torture porn almost requires its constituted audience to confront the deeper questions surrounding torture. According to Jeremy Morris, "it is significant how the genre entangles moral questions about torture with moral questions about its own audience."[849] Rather than provide a political justification for torture, torture porn asks its audience to question their own complicity with evil. As Werner Bohleber explains, the film's "traumatic reality not only brings theoretical convictions into question but also confronts us with the horror, cruelty and mortal fear that must come up for discussion."[850] Further, the multiple layers of inversion present in the torture porn genre also invites its audience to confront other questions related to the larger geopolitical and moral environment, such as the spectre of xenophobia and American exceptionalism. According to Chris Hewitt, Roth "has compelling things on his mind: The price of not facing up to

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[846] Marcelo N. Viñar, "The Specificity of Torture as Trauma: The Human Wilderness When Words Fail," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 86 (2005): 319. Wiley Online Library.

[847] It is very possible that scenes of righteous agency and series like *24* serve a complimentary function to the Nine-Eleven films. Although outside the immediate scope of this project, this could be fruitful ground for future research.

[848] According to Kristeva, the refusal to understand the phobic object as abject traps the subject, oscillating between the structure of the Symbolic and the trauma of the Real (which she conceives of as a splitting similar to the barred subject, but in relation to the object of fear). See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 46-50.

[849] Jeremy Morris, "The Justification of Torture-Horror: Retribution and Sadism in 'Saw,' 'Hostel,' and 'The Devil's Rejects'," in *The Philosophy of Horror*, ed. Thomas Fahy (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 52.

[850] Werner Bohleber, "Remembrance, Trauma and Collective Memory: The Battle for Memory in Psychoanalysis," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 88 (2007): 347.

who you are … [and] the way some American[s] … behave as if the world was made for them."[851] For Roth, *Hostel* "is about arrogance and xenophobia, and the human tendency to exploit others, even to unimaginable extremes."[852] For some, however, it is those unimaginable extremes that permanently relegates torture porn to the bottom drawer of horror cinema.

Focusing almost exclusively on the graphic gore, magazines began publishing feature stories calling torture porn a product of the times. "There's something about rising gas prices, apocalyptic anxieties, and unpopular foreign wars," Ross Douthat wrote, "that makes filmmakers turn to brutal, nihilistic gore."[853] For critic Lisa Kennedy, *Hostel*'s violent excess became almost tedious. Eschewing the term torture porn, she labels the film "gore bore," and argues that the film "takes us someplace cruel – and deeply unfunny. Just because that's Roth's intention doesn't mean his movie is any good."[854] According to Charles Britton, the (over)reliance on violent depictions detracted so much from the narrative that *Hostel* "even fail[ed] to get much excitement out of a climactic car chase," and those "associated with this film should be ashamed of themselves."[855] For others, however, the gore was integral to the audience's affective reaction and the relentless nature of the violence was part of the story itself. Michael Rechtshaffen argued that *Hostel* contained such "shocking violence" that it "punish[ed] the voyeuristic viewer as much as the screen victims for so willingly partaking of the

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[851] Chris Hewitt, "Hostel," *Pioneer Press*, January 9, 2006, Entertainment News section. LexisNexis (K1815).
[852] Andrew O'Hehir, "Beyond the Multiplex," *Salon*, January 5, 2006, Movie Reviews section. LexisNexis.
[853] Ross Douthat, "Punch the Director!," *National Review*, July 9, 2007. LexisNexis.
[854] Lisa Kennedy, "Don't Bother Checking In," *The Denver Post*, January 6, 2006, Final edition, F-08. LexisNexis.
[855] Charles Britton, "Hostel," *Copley News Service*, January 4, 2006, Daily Features section. LexisNexis.

former."[856] For Rechtshaffen, the gore is necessary for the audience to interrogate their desire and enjoyment of it. For the audience, this can represent the radical break between the self and the Other which allows horror to emerge in the abject space that offers the opportunity for working-through. Viñar explains,

> On the border between the abjectness of power and ideals, the word ceases to have its ordinary function. … Narrative realization, the human capacity to share and interchange experiences by means of language [is] nullified. In this regard, one must be radical: there is no humanity without this faculty to share experience through language. Horror generates fear; it does not generate communicable experience.[857]

The benefit of maintaining a radical break and allowing the horror to emerge is that it locks off the danger of negative sublimity and working-off. From a rhetorical perspective, torture porn competes with other popular culture representations in the constitution of the American subject, and one of the ways it hopes to gain rhetorical dominance is through the fascinating spectacle of violence.[858]

To work-through abjection, Kristeva argues, one must hold open the wound and reckon with it. For her, the psychotherapeutic fiction must be "controlled by the necessity of going through abjection, whose intimate side is suffering and horror its public feature."[859] It is impossible to sublimate abjection without recognition that it is always-already a part of us, and the graphic gore of torture porn provides the opportunity to connect with the abject and accept our enjoyment in it. A film that hopes to simply frighten can rely on loud noises and foreboding music, but a film that hopes to horrify

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[856] Michael Rechtshaffen, "Movie Review -- 'Hostel'," *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 6, 2006, Entertainment News section. LexisNexis.

[857] Viñar, "Specificity of Torture," 328.

[858] In his discussion of the rhetorical competition surrounding the torture debate, John Ip wrote that, ""the same battles that have been fought over the treatment of detainees in the 'war on terror' in the legal and political arenas by real world actors in the years since 9/11 have also been fought at a discursive level in popular culture." John Ip, "Two Narratives of Torture," *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* 7 (2009): 36.

[859] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 140.

and engage the abject must include the "gross biological processes" which "foreground[s] aspects of human biology in a manner that renders biology disgusting."[860] Robert Kilker writes, "The abject is horrifying because it is something that disgusts us, yet comes *from* us or from which we come."[861] Torture porn wants not only to frighten, but to horrify and provide the opportunity for its audience to confront its trauma which, for Jonathan Boulter, must themselves enact trauma. In his reading of Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye,* Boulter argues there cannot be a "separation of form and content but an extremely complex relation between the two, a relation articulated by what I will call the 'trope' of trauma."[862] Because there is a necessary disjunct between the traumatic and the ability to fully articulate it, fictional narratives like Bataille's "attemp[t] to reproduce the originary, 'primal scene' of trauma, to confront its [audience] with an accurate textual representation of the sensation of [trauma]."[863] The impossibility of articulating abjection requires artistic engagements attempt the (re)presentation of it.[864] For Kristeva, the artistic abject is

> itself an impure process that protects from the abject only by being immersed in it. The abject, mimed through sound and meaning, is *repeated*. Getting rid of it is out of the question; … one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity … in order to give us, by means of

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[860] Hutchings, *Horror Film*, 36.

[861] Robert Kilker, "All Roads Lead to the Abject: The Monstrous Feminine and Gender Boundaries in Stanley Kubrick's 'The Shining'," *Literature Film Quarterly* 34 (2006): 58. EBSCOhost (19974959). *Emphasis in original.*

[862] Jonathan Boulter, "The Negative Way of Trauma: Georges Bataille's 'Story of the Eye'," *Cultural Critique* 46 (2000): 154. EBSCOhost.

[863] Boulter, "The Negative Way," 173.

[864] This might also provide a better understanding of why there is a structural similarity between the torture porn film and the Nine-Eleven narrative. Because the Abu Ghraib scandal was narrativized through the Nine-Eleven narrative, the torture porn film can better (re)present the trauma for its audience juxtaposed with that structural form. Boulter argues that these (re)presentations have a structural requirement which is "a key element in the thematic exploration of eroticism, death, and bodily trauma." Boulter, "The Negative Way," 156.

> consciousness, control over our defilements and, through that very consciousness, making us free and joyous.[865]

Simply put, the torture porn film can act as the return of the repressed, isolating the missed experience, and neutralizing the traumatic impact without removing its abject quality. The graphic gore in torture porn serves to display the horror rather than anesthetize it and allows the audience to be both repulsed by and drawn to it.[866]

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I looked at the affective frames of the analyzed films and applied the lessons that psychoanalysis provided to determine what, if any, psychotherapeutic potential exists in these films. I found that both the Nine-Eleven and Testimonial films refuse an engagement with the issue of torture, which leaves the traumatic nature of Abu Ghraib in place. The Nine-Eleven films ignored the issue of torture through negative sublimation and held to Nine-Eleven as a founding trauma. The Testimonial films talk directly about Abu Ghraib, but instead of engaging the horror of torture, allow for a process of working-off that dissolves the trauma into an exercise of blaming the Bush administration. Torture porn, however, uses the same themes and structures as a vanishing mediator to directly engage the horror of torture and provide its audience the opportunity to work-through that trauma. For many, there was a personal culpability in the torture at Abu Ghraib and torture porn holds open that potential for those who consume it. In its confrontation with the horror of torture, the torture porn often engages in a series of cultural inversions to destabilize the dominant strategies and hold open the

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[865] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 28-29.

[866] In my analysis, the two films that deviated the most from the others (in terms of graphic violence) were *The Strangers* and *Vacancy*. It was these two films that also had the least amount of gore on-screen. Possible explanations for this could be that these films attempt to show the psychological damage of torture, they hope that the images the audience creates in their heads are worse than what special effects could show, or that these two films lie at the margins of the genre. Any of these explanations are, to me, sufficient and don't truly challenge the validity of my observations.

issue of torture for interrogation by the abjected subject it hopes to constitute. These films suggest that the abject always-already haunts the subject and will forever remain but "cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge."[867] From a psychoanalytic perspective, confronting the abjection of torture is not an attempt to master the horror, but to experience it from within the open wound. The torture porn film provides the subject the opportunity to hold open the wound of torture and experience both the revulsion and enjoyment, which is the process of working-through abjected trauma. Now, the question remains: to what end?

[867] Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 153. Caruth also warns that reducing the trauma to a simple story removes the lessons we can learn from the event and minimizes the impact it had on the victims. She writes, "the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory … may lose both the precision and the force" of what made the event traumatic. Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 153.

Conclusion: Patterns of Horror

As the United States approached the 10-year anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001, *The New York Times* ran an article concluding that the history curriculum in U.S. secondary schools needed to include a comprehensive dissection of Nine-Eleven as a cultural event. Pamela R. Moran and David Socol argued that our nation's history is culturally written and that a social understanding of events is necessary to produce an informed citizenry. They wrote,

> The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, constitute a horrific event in the history of the United States that continues to influence our societal, political and personal decisions. … An understanding of history revitalizes citizenship in an era when students can witness history being constructed. … This struggle over how the past is remembered reaches students in many other ways. Not just through news, but through films, novels and other fiction. … [H]istory emerges from the people who populate these stories and is brought forward by those who document and tell those stories. … Sept. 11, 2001, subject to multiple forms of 'telling' almost since the day itself, is an important place to initiate this work since the events of that day have become so essential to Americans and their relationships to their own government and the world. We suggest beginning with the concept of history as stories.[868]

The way an event is historicized and remembered by society is not confined to textbooks, but can be "taken over" by the cultural artifacts that (re)present it. As John Kenneth Muir notes, "*Art does not exist in a vacuum*. Instead, it is inexorably bound to the time period from which it sprang. … [M]ore often than not, there is *intent* in art to reflect, reveal, contrast or echo some important element of the creator's universe."[869] For Edwin Black, the role of the rhetorical critic is to comment on a culture's artifacts in an effort to

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[868] Pamela R. Moran and Ira David Socol, "Why September 11, 2001 Must Be in Our Classrooms," The New York Times Online, August 29, 2011, accessed May 2, 2012, http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/29/teaching-911-why-how/, par. 1-20.
[869] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*, 1. *Emphasis in original*.

understand the subject as constituted by a culture's rhetoric.[870] In critical enterprise, it is important that the critic not presume knowledge, but let the artifacts speak for themselves. Through my frame genre criticism in this study, I outlined definitive patterns and themes emerging from both the Mainstream News Organizations and popular films surrounding the Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib master and counter-narratives. In this final chapter, I will first summarize what this project has covered as a whole. Second, I will outline what can be learned by looking at the conclusions of, and the dialectical interactions between, the three discourses analyzed. Third, I will reflect on my analysis to advance three lessons about the function of horror in relation to trauma and identity.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Humans understand their world through the use of fantasy, narratives, and stories. In the context of Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib, the interplay between fantasy, the master narrative, and counter-narrative work to constitute rhetorically a multitude of individual identities (the American subject) and national identities (the social body), each mutually constitutive of the other. In this sense, it can be helpful to think of an individual fantasy and the social narrative(s) as working together to create a helix of subjectivity with each negotiated synthesis in a continuous dialectical movement around a rhetorical axis that functions to center the subject.[871] In times of national trauma, these axes become

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[870] See Black, "The Second Persona," 334-335.

[871] For clarification, let me explain how fantasy and narrative could interplay in the development of a subject position as constituted by a Nine-Eleven negative sublimity. The fantasy axis for this subject is a desire for security against the danger of the Other – this resides in the realm of fantasy in that it locates desire on an external object, allows for its endless pursuit, and covers the impossibility of ever being truly "secure." The social narrative axis is created by a synthesis of the Nine-Eleven master narrative and the Abu Ghraib counter-narrative; in the case of negative sublimity, this synthesis resolves itself by holding a fidelity to the founding trauma (Nine-Eleven). In this case, the individual fantasy drives the social narrative while, at the same time, always-already born from that social narrative, causing corrections in both through the negotiated dialectic. These negotiated corrections to the fantasy and narrative axes create a third axis, which constitutes the helix of the subject committed to negative sublimity. The multitude of

dislodged and force a (re)negotiation of the subject positions they rhetorically stabilize. One of the roles a rhetorical critic can play is to examine these storied negotiations in an effort to better understand the time and culture from which they emerge. Through this project, I hoped to gain insight into what effect horror narratives in particular have on the rhetorical constitution of the both the individual and the social body during times of national trauma and cultural upheaval. Discerning narrative patterns is primarily a rhetorical task, and horror can be understood as a rhetorical manifestation that is animated, or brought into being, by biological fear.[872] In relation to trauma, then, horror can be said to be rhetorical in two ways, both of which relate to horror and meaning. In the first way, horror is rhetorical as it fixes meaning to a feeling of biological fear. For Becker, Langer, and the Terror Management Theory researchers, horror drives meaning, placing it firmly in the realm of rhetoric. In the second sense, horror is rhetorical as it also paradoxically fails to fix meaning to a feeling of biological fear. Failures of the Symbolic erupt in horror, which thus become a significant locus of rhetoric as meaning-making.

I began my efforts to better understand the effect of horror during times of cultural upheaval by looking specifically at the events of September 11, 2001 and the Abu Ghraib torture scandal that followed. To understand how horror impacts the rhetorical constitution and negotiation of trauma and identity, it was important to first chart the social development of the master and counter-narrative surrounding these events, and with such a large and various corpus of texts, discerning these constituted the

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subject positions along this helix then work together to (re)create the social master narrative in an endless pursuit of identity.

[872] This is *not* to say that I consider horror to be *exclusively* rhetorical, but that I am primarily interested in its rhetorical dimensions. As such, I have attempted to limit my use of the word "horror" to a rhetorical context, although I may have used the word with its more common understanding. I ask the reader to take each reference to "horror" in its surrounding context.

primary methodological challenge of this study. When looking at the discourse of Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib rhetorically, one finds a conglomeration of thousands of discreet and disparate "texts," in an unwieldy storm of nuance and contradiction. In an effort to discern meaning and draw out the larger narratives from this storm, I turned to genre criticism, which seeks to locate patterns and constellations of meaning between texts. Because of the sheer number of texts (and their disparate quality), I also incorporated reading techniques from the method of frame analysis to help me provide structure to the patterns that emerged. Together, my efforts became a hybrid method or approach that I term "frame genre criticism," which locates narratives and themes across a multitude of texts. My approach to "close reading" is, admittedly, *the* limitation of looking at a cultural discourse and one is always left wondering if s/he analyzed enough artifacts and if those that were examined were truly representative of the larger whole. Although it may be impossible to ever completely tackle the challenges of representation, I believe rhetorical studies and its techniques of reading provides a more robust account than reducing media analysis to a number (e.g. content analysis). A reading of 250 artifacts discerned a signature of patterns that, when studied against a backdrop of psychoanalytic theory, offer insights into the rhetorical place of horror both broadly (social discourse) and narrowly (films) conceived.[873]

In my frame genre analysis, I found that the administration and MNO discourse helped construct the Nine-Eleven master narrative that can be read as a story with a three act structure; the United States, as an unsuspecting victim, is attacked without provocation, becomes a mighty hero and rises up to restore order, successful in those efforts. The Nine-Eleven films served to solidify this master narrative and provide

[873] I believe that, at the very least, this project can act as a first attempt to engage a question that has been largely ignored in rhetorical studies to this point – what is the place of horror in relation to identity construction during times of national trauma?

audiences the opportunity to memorialize the events of September 11 through their consumption of these films. The emergence of the Abu Ghraib photographs, however, destabilized the Nine-Eleven master narrative and gave rise to a counter-narrative, one where the mighty hero had a darker side and, in its efforts to restore order, embraced torture as policy. The blame for this torture and the loss of international reputation for the United States could be laid at the feet of the Bush administration, the counter-narrative contended. The Testimonial films worked to challenge the happy ending of the Nine-Eleven master narrative and provide an opportunity to calm a feeling of complicity in the torture of the Iraqi prisoners by externalizing the blame to the administration. The Nine-Eleven master narrative and Abu Ghraib counter-narrative struggled for rhetorical dominance in defining the American subject, but focused less on the act of torture and more on definitional questions and issues of blame. It is in this strange absence of direct confrontation with torture that we witness the rise of torture porn, a genre of horror film that does not shy away from an engagement with torture. This engagement with torture acts as a vanishing mediator in the dialectic between the master and counter-narrative and creates at least three subject positions along the negotiated helix: negative sublimity, working-off, and working through.

ENDINGS AND DIALECTICAL INTERACTIONS

As this project nears its end, it seems only appropriate to discuss endings. The year 2008 saw both the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States and the end of the torture porn cycle.[874] It could be that these two events are unrelated, but

[874] Although there are certainly torture porn films that were released later, the vast majority were released prior to 2009, which is why most scholars mark the end of the cycle at 2008. For example, Steffen Hantke argues that the success of films such as *Cloverfield* and *The Mist* signals the end of the torture porn cycle in 2008. Steffen Hantke, "They Don't Make 'Em Like They Used To," in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 7.

there is some sense that they are, at least tangentially, connected. According to Dahlia Lithwick, Americans believed that the election of Obama would "bring the end of waterboarding and the reinstatement of the Geneva Conventions. … We [are] forgiving ourselves. We are telling ourselves that what happened at Abu Ghraib is behind us, and that what happened at C.I.A. black sites is over."[875] Obama campaigned on the promise of "hope and change," and his election victory signaled the end of the Bush-era and a national working-through of the torture scandals, which bled into film and television as well. According to John Doyle, the hit Fox television show *24* "epitomized the Bush-era response: The terrorist would be thwarted or defeated by any means necessary, and that included torture … In the Obama era, *24* got old real fast. … With the cancellation of *24*, the time of Bush-era TV is now officially over. Obama did it."[876] The election of Obama itself may not have ended the torture porn cycle, but his election marked a psychical change in the social body of the United States such that "by 2009, the [torture porn] formula had ceased to be financially viable."[877] It is difficult to guarantee a causal connection between this horror cycle and the surrounding political discourse, but these box office results are too tidy to be mere coincidence.

In the discourses analyzed in this project, there were both happy and unhappy endings. The Nine-Eleven master narrative has a happy (albeit premature) ending – Bush landed on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln and declared "Mission

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[875] Dahlia Lithwick, "Forgive Not," *The New York Times*, January 11, 2009, Editorial section, Late edition. LexisNexis. To be clear, Lithwick is critical of these desires to push the issue of torture to the side, but argues that the desire exists. As further evidence, On the day following the 2008 presidential election, the editorial board of *The Platform* counted down the number of days from the Dred Scott decision (55,395 days) through the Abu Ghraib scandal (1,651 days) to Obama's presidency, concluding that Americans, "knowing that wrongs of past days can be righted in hopes of better days ahead, [elected] Barack Obama." "Wednesday Editorial: America Voted," *The Platform*, November 5, 2008. LexisNexis.

[876] John Doyle, "Who Killed '24'? Barack Obama Stands Accused," *The Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2010, Televsion section.

[877] Amanda Ann Klein, *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, & Defining Subcultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 14.

Accomplished."[878] Similarly, the Nine-Eleven films have happy endings; *World Trade Center* ends with a joyous barbeque of friends and family and *United 93* ends with the passengers preventing the terrorists from crashing a plane into the White House. Conversely, the counter-narrative has an unhappy ending; Abu Ghraib had become a "prox[y] for this nation's gross abuse of human rights and the rule of law" and the lack of accountability set the standard for formalized military abuse.[879] The Testimonial films also have unhappy endings; U.S. soldiers were used as scapegoats to protect those higher up in the chain-of-command. In *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, for example, Sergeant Ken Davis explains that nobody was brought to trial for the CIA murder of a "ghost detainee," but both soldiers Graner and Harman were court-martialed for taking pictures of the corpse. He notes that the military "won't charge the murderer even though it's ruled a homicide, but [will] charge you for taking pictures and exposing that a murder happened here. I don't understand. There is a hole in this whole investigation. It's a black, dark hole that says cover-up."[880] Finally, for their part, the torture porn films have both unhappy endings and incomplete plots; order is restored in the short-term, but with a promise that the torture and horror will continue. In *Hostel*, the torture industry continues in Slovakia; in *Wolf Creek*, the killer, Mick, gets away to continue his murderous streak; in *House of*

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[878] Bill Sammon, "Bush Declares 'Victory' in Iraq," *The Washington Times*, May 2, 2003, Page One section, Final edition. LexisNexis.

[879] David R. Irvine, "Do Americans Consent to What We Are, a Nation That Sanctions Torture?," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, November 13, 2007, Opinion section. LexisNexis. As an example of formalized military abuse, an article in the *Contra Costa Times* regarding the Haditha massacre noted, "It is unfortunate that the military's reaction, as in the case of Abu Ghraib, was to cover up gross troop misconduct." "Investigate the Killings," *Contra Costa Times*, June 7, 2006, Opinion section. LexisNexis. According to the article, the Haditha massacre occurred when a roadside bomb killed Marine Lance Corporal Miguel Terrazas and "mounting evidence suggests that a Marine unit indiscriminately slaughtered men, women, and children to avenge the death of a comrade, and that military officials lied about what happened."

[880] *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, 61:00. This theme of scapegoating appears in *Standard Operating Procedure* as well. Javal argued that the higher-ups "sacrifice[d] the little guy" to cover themselves, and concluded that "somebody caught our administration with their pants down and they're pissed off at that." *Standard Operating Procedure*, 92:00, 102:00.

1000 Corpses, the Firefly family is left unchecked; in the *Saw* franchise, Jigsaw's tortuous repetition is passed on from person to person – from John Kramer (the original Jigsaw killer), to his former victim turned protégé Amanda Young, to Mark Hoffman, the detective who investigates the crimes. After the credits roll, the torture continues.

I have argued that the working-through potential in torture porn acts as a vanishing mediator, understood as the third term that helps synthesize the dialectic before falling away, between the master and counter-narrative. In a similar sense, the incomplete ending of torture porn may act as a vanishing mediator for the happy endings of the Nine-Eleven films and the unhappy endings of the Testimonial films. As such, these three sets of films can be read together as framing a larger cultural discourse surrounding Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib. Although torture porn may carry psychotherapeutic potential, the mediating function of its incomplete ending may, ironically, be necessary for the continued smooth functioning of the United States nation-state as a larger, discursive, system. Much like a torture porn film, the credits rolled on the Bush presidency, order was seemingly restored, but the torture continued. As of this writing, the Obama administration has done little to reverse the Bush-era torture policies; Guantanamo Bay has not been closed, the practice of extraordinary rendition continues, military drone attacks have escalated, and there is even an international move to revoke Obama's Nobel Peace Prize (which he was awarded after serving less than one year as U.S. president).[881] Neither the master narrative nor the counter-narrative dealt directly with the horror of torture, leaving a traumatic kernel in the psyche of the American social body. As a vanishing mediator, torture porn may help reconcile the trauma torture, and then – as vanishing mediators do – fall away, leaving the system changed but more or

[881] "The Growing Campaign to Revoke Obama's Nobel Peace Prize," *Africa News*, April 5, 2013. LexisNexis.

less intact. The lasting impression that one may take from this is that, although working-through can be psychically beneficial, it cannot be considered a panacea. In a larger sense, however, one might ask what this project offers to rhetorical studies beyond a possible explanation of identity construction in relation to Nine-Eleven and Abu Ghraib? In an effort to illustrate a larger contribution to the discipline of rhetorical studies, let me turn to the larger lessons that this project offers.

THE LESSONS OF HORROR

This project was guided by three research questions, which I would like to provide a short answer for here before engaging in a more detailed discussion of the place of horror in trauma.

RQ 1: How does horror impact our personal and national identity in times of cultural upheaval?

This project suggests there were at least three possible responses to the horror bound with the rupture of the Nine-Eleven master narrative: (1) give in to the horror and demand violent revenge in an effort to remain faithful to the founding trauma – "negative sublimity;" (2) attempt to master the horror and externalize the blame – "working-off;" (3) accept the horror to traverse the fantasy, alternately cast as "working-through."

RQ 2: What role does horror play in the construction and (re)negotiation of master narratives and counter-narratives?

My analysis suggests the answer to this question depends upon where the constituted subject locates the horror in the dialectic between master and counter-narrative. In this dialectic, the trauma is the gap "in the past that resists being entirely filled in, healed or harmonized in the present" and horror is used to negotiate where that gap resides.[882]

[882] LaCapra, "Lanzmann's 'Shoah'," 244.

RQ 3: What role does horror in popular culture, specifically the horror film, play in respect to trauma and identity?

My analysis of the torture porn genre suggests that these films hold open the wound of abjection to engage the insatiable *jouissance* of the audience. This holding open of the wound acts to help mediate the dialectic between the master and counter-narrative and allows an opportunity to work-through the trauma. From these short answers, I believe that there are three lessons regarding horror that we can take away from this project: (1) horror can be dangerous; (2) horror can locate trauma; and (3) horror can be psychotherapeutic. It is from these lessons that we can begin to see the larger place that horror should be awarded in the study of rhetoric.

Horror can be dangerous

This project outlined three distinct responses to the horrifying trauma of Abu Ghraib: negative sublimity, working-off, and working-through. In the face of horror, humans have demonstrated a potential for violence and each of these responses carries with them differing degrees of "danger," defined roughly as harmful violence produced by the subject. Negative sublimity, a concept that refers to a counter-inutitive commitment to a founding trauma, can allow a government to maintain a violent state of exception indefinitely and may risk vengeful attempts to satiate a pathogenic wish. According to LaCapra, "trauma in collectivities" that choose negative sublimity creates a "sacrificial crisis" and "concentrat[es] violence on one (or a delimited set of) scapegoated victim(s)."[883] For those who engaged in negative sublimity, September 11, 2001 was a

[883] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 45. For LaCapra, these sacrifices often become unbounded violence, which is what I mean when I refer to the violence in the indefinite state of exception. He writes, "the scapegoating in sacrifice is bound up with binary oppositions (self and other, insider and outsider) that, in their putatively pure form, can become extremely unstable, as 'suspect' insiders are projected to the outside and violence returns to characterize relations within the community that seemed to protect itself by selecting a discrete victim or set of victims." LaCapra, *Writing History*, 24.

founding trauma that fundamentally "changed the world" and colored their understanding of subsequent events. When one views the torture of Abu Ghraib through the filter of negative sublimity, it is easy to endorse the torture as justifiable revenge or, at minimum, dismiss the torture as the cost of keeping the nation safe.

While a commitment to the Nine-Eleven master narrative can be viewed as an exercise in negative sublimity, I argue that embracing the counter-narrative can be understood as a kind of working-off, which resolves trauma by displacing its dissonant qualities. When looking at working-off, one might conclude that because the traumatic event is merely displaced, the result is not particularly *dangerous*. Although it may be true that working-off is not inherently violent, in the context of horror and abjection, it leans in that direction. According to Lagache, the process of working-off requires the subject to remove one's self from the traumatic memory (in an effort to neutralize the personal impact) and place it onto an object.[884] For Kristeva, creating such an object of trauma generates an irrational fear of it and risks aggression against that object.[885] As related to horror, working-off sets the stage for the subject to become what s/he hates; just as Little Hans' fear of being bitten by a horse is really his fear of biting, the abjected gaps in the Symbolic are filled in by an object that only redirects aggression. In the beginning, the Symbolic gap is "constructed as the inaccessible X around which my desire circulates … then, in the shift towards drive, I (the subject) 'make myself seen' as the Thing – in a reflexive turn, I see *myself* as It, the traumatic object-Thing I didn't want to see."[886] Put in the context of torture and Abu Ghraib, Gabriele Schwab explains that, "torture destroys not only the victim but also the perpetrator, if only because in order to

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[884] Lagache, *Selected Papers*.
[885] This is what Kristeva refers to as the impossibility of mastery over abjection and the danger that attempted mastery generates an aggressive response.
[886] Žižek, *Ticklish Subject*, 300-301.

kill his [sic] victim's self, the torture must also kill his own soul."[887] In psychoanalytic terms, the displacement of the trauma means the emotion inspired by the traumatic event is never removed from the (repressed) memory of that event, which ensures its ultimate return because it was never abreacted or released.[888]

In contrast, working-through, understood as the incorporation of a traumatic event into the Symbolic, doesn't displace the originary trauma but confronts it in "a sociocultural context fashioned, in part, by the community's general conceptualization and specific assessment of loss and trauma."[889] *Prima facie*, working-through appears to be the "safest" approach (and it probably is), but this does not mean that there is no risk of violence, especially when one looks at the complex interplay that exists in a cultural discourse. This violent risk is magnified when one realizes that the social assessment of trauma is an ideological one and "different ideologies may cause individuals to attribute different meanings to events, leading to varied emotional responses of varied intensity."[890] As Caruth and others have noted, the goal of working-through trauma is not to finish writing its history and seal the event away. Each crack in the master narrative, each counter-narrative, and each mediation between them, holds both the potential for violence and the opportunity to challenge the assemblages of power and control inherent in a state of exception. As Arthur G. Neal argues, "the narratives of [national] traumatic events can never be told once and for all. … The uncertainty surrounding national traumas permit drawing upon them as raw materials for forging new identities, for setting

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[887] Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 39.
[888] Rather than repeat myself, I will defer the summary of how confrontation defuses the violent potential until the section on the psychotherapeutic effect of horror.
[889] Mary Beth Williams, Ellen S. Zinner, and Richard R. Ellis, "The Connection Between Grief and Trauma: An Overview," in *When a Community Weeps: Case Studies in Group Survivorship*, eds. Ellen S. Zinner and Mary Beth Williams (Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, 1999), 11.
[890] Raviv et al., "Reactions to National Trauma," 300.

the record straight, and for shaping new sets of opportunities."[891] In the liminal space of a ruptured master narrative, competing cultural stories will emerge and struggle for dominance. The one that "wins" is the narrative that best gives order to the "chaotic and disturbing experience – to resolve haunting contradictions and contain apprehensions, to imagine a way out of darkness."[892] This insight, then, leads us to the next lesson we can take away – that horror can serve to locate the site of trauma.

Horror can locate trauma

I have suggested that "horror" properly understood is the rhetorical manifestation of a biologically-based feeling of fear and, through its discursive properties, focusing on horror can help locate the scene or event of trauma, or, more specifically, where a subject *wishes* to locate the traumatic site. With this project, I hoped to better understand how horror interacts with national identity and the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib; through those efforts, it became clearer that one of the disconnects between the three subject positions articulated here – negative sublimity, working-off, and working-through – centered around what made Abu Ghraib horrifying in the first place. For the subject engaged in negative sublimity, the horror was what happened on September 11 and Abu Ghraib was just the cost of doing business.[893] For the subject engaged in working-off, the horror was that the administration was not held accountable. For the subject who sought to work-through, the horror was the act of torture itself.

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[891] Neal, *National Trauma*, ix-x.

[892] Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 254.

[893] For some, not only was Abu Ghraib acceptable, it should have been expected. After all, "war is hell, and it's not an experiment in sociology or a classroom for a bunch of liberal debaters, particularly noncombatants." "A Good Man," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 21, 2004, Editorial section, Sooner edition. LexisNexis.

An effort to locate the site of trauma in discourse is not simply an academic exercise, but harbors political potential. It is too easy to bracket the issue of torture and alleviate complicity by externalizing blame and focus on the definitional debates of what constitutes "torture," as the Testimonial films would have us do. As Noah Feldman explains, "there is also something reassuring in blaming lawyers for what went wrong. If the problem is with the law, after all, then fixing it can prevent another Abu Ghraib."[894] And while the counter-narrative, however ironically, approached the issue of torture obliquely, *the master narrative avoided it entirely*. In hindsight, many commentators have concluded that the torture at Abu Ghraib happened, at least in part, because of the avoidance. There was evidence of torture at American-controlled black sites prior to the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs, but the social body, as rhetorically constituted by the MNOs, was able to push the issue aside and pretend that it wasn't happening. The Abu Ghraib pictures forced the American public to admit something they knew all along, but wanted their own form of plausible deniability. The master and counter narrative do not locate the site of trauma, but locate the site where the traumatized subject *wants it to be*. As Bent Rosenbaum and Sverre Varvin explain, the "destruction of the capacity for symbolization of traumatic experience may threaten the mind with chaotic states against which [sic] the 'I' tries to defend itself and find a balanced psychic *mise-en-scène*."[895] The long-term danger is that the avoidance mechanisms betokened by both the master and counter-narrative become instantiated in the culture and a true working-through is continually forestalled. Otto Kerberg warns that there is a potential for "linguistic and

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[894] Noah Feldman, "Ugly Americans," in *The Torture Debate in America*, ed. Karen J. Greenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 271.
[895] Bent Rosenbaum and Sverre Varvin, "The Influence of Extreme Traumatization on Body, Mind and Social Relations," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 88 (2007): 1527.

cultural characteristics" to "become integrated with self-representations to consolidate ego identity."[896]

An engagement with the abject horror of torture is *the* unique psychical work of working-through the trauma of Abu Ghraib. Rather than repress the horror and allow for defense mechanisms to deny the abject or reorient what torture means, working-through requires a confrontation with torture and its legacy of brutality. This is what is at stake when one locates the mark of trauma in competing narratives. Bohleber explains,

> Disasters that are defined as [hu]man-made, such as holocaust, war and political and ethnic persecution, use specific means of dehumanization and personality destruction in order to annihilate the human being's historical and social existence. It is beyond the individual's capacities to integrate such traumatic experiences in a narrative context on an idiosyncratic basis; a social discourse is also required concerning the historical truth of the traumatic events … If defensive impulses predominate in society or rules of silence obtain, traumatized survivors are left alone with their experiences.[897]

The issue in play is a moral one and rhetorical strategies of working-through understand that even if their efforts might be ultimately integrated into a larger discourse that helps the system rumble forward. With this in mind, let's turn to the third lesson we can take from this discussion.

Horror can be psychotherapeutic

The rhetorical character of horror imbues it with psychotherapeutic potential as it can hold open the abjected wound, thereby providing the traumatized subject an opportunity to engage abjection without attempting to gain mastery over it. The torture porn film, in particular, can be seen as the return of the repressed, continually arising under different titles that are put into conversation with one another, sometimes bringing

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[896] Otto F. Kernberg, "Sanctioned Social Violence: A Psychoanalytic View, Part I," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 84 (2003): 694.
[897] Bohleber, "Remembrance, Trauma and Collective Memory," 343.

the traumatic event into the larger discourse of social issues and helping the social body work-through the trauma. As they relate to trauma and abjection, films in a horror cycle act as staging events that socially orient the personal fantasies of the spectator toward the signification of a traumatic event.[898] For Freud and Breuer, these staging events can act as a surrogate to the vengeful pathogenic wish.[899] For John Nelson, extreme horror is necessary to attract our attention "so that we can recognize and analyze them. … [H]orror lets us learn [the evils of everyday life], refine our defenses, improve ourselves, and come together in action."[900] And, according to Caruth, it is important that the event maintain its traumatic properties to be a strategic act in working through.[901]

For Georges Bataille, the traumatic properties of an event are showcased when both the political and animalistic properties are present and juxtaposed with one another.[902] An example of this juxtaposition occurs at the 45:30 minute-mark in the

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[898] As Bob Rehak, a professor of film history at Swarthmore College, explains, real world fears are condensed to metaphors in a horror film where the audience can "play out the conflict in a really simplified way." Bob Rehak, "Scary Cycle: World Events Help Shape Horror Films," quoted in James Mayse, *Messenger-Inquirer*, August 4, 2007, State and Regional News section. LexisNexis. For Roth, *Hostel* gives the audience what they're looking for. Citing examples from *Le Monde* (which argued that *Hostel* was about unchecked capitalism) and *Art Forum* (which found commentary on American imperialism), Roth concluded, "I like having my disgust with the Bush administration … in the movie, and it's there if you want to see it." Peter Whittle, "Here's Blood in Your Eye," *The Sunday Times*, June 10, 2007, Culture section. LexisNexis.

[899] Freud and Breuer write, "If the reaction is suppressed the affect remains bound up with the memory. … [L]anguage provides a surrogate for action and with its assistance the affect can be '*abreacted*' almost as well." Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, 11. Adam Lowenstein argues that academic interrogation of the extreme violence in torture porn can provide a richer understanding of abjection and trauma. Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical, Trama, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 1-2.

[900] John S. Nelson, "Horror Films Face Political Evils in Everyday Life," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 385.

[901] See Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 154. Kristeva also argues that the traumatic properties of an event are necessary for sublimation of the abject, denying it its aggressive properties.

[902] According to Bataille, the event needs to keep its traumatic characteristic to ensure its excessive, animalistic, qualities. The telling of Integration and the (re)telling of Admonishment move the event into the political, which sets torture up for forensic dramas and questions that undermine its traumatic impact like, "was Abu Ghraib torture?" For Bataille, trauma requires excess and excess requires the denial of the political and relishing the animalistic. When discussing the trauma of Hiroshima, Bataille juxtaposes the rhetoric of Mr. Tanimoto, a Hiroshima survivor, and Harry Truman, the man who ordered the nuclear

touchstone torture porn film, *Hostel*. As the Dutch businessman removes his surgical mask, revealing himself, Josh screams through the tears and bile, "I didn't do shit to you. What the fuck?" Assuming that the businessman was hired by others to torture him, Josh bargains for his freedom by offering to double the amount the businessman is being paid. The businessman looks at Josh with incredulity and, right before he slits Josh's throat, he says, "Pay me? I'm paying *them*." The screen goes black for a fraction of a second and it is in this blank space that the political and the animal are juxtaposed. There is no political rationale for the torture; nobody paid the Dutch businessman to torture Josh by proxy and there was no information to be learned. For the businessman, the torture was an end to itself. While the audience is frightened as the sequence unfolds, the true horror emerges in this cinematic fraction of a second when the screen goes black. In this moment, the audience realizes that this man travelled thousands of miles with intent only to torture another human. For this sequence to occur – for a Dutch businessman to be able to purchase an American tourist for torture in a faraway land – there has to be an advanced system for travel and communication, a transcontinental organizational structure, an understanding of an exchange economy, and countless other prerequisites to the political being, all of which are put in motion so that a person may devolve into animalistic behavior. Such stories lie at the core of abjected horror for Kristeva:

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attack. Bataille contends that the praiseworthy accounts of Hiroshima are from people like Mr. Tanimoto, narratives that "are reduced to the dimensions of *animal* experience. The *human* representation of the catastrophe is that given by President Truman; it immediately situates the bombing of Hiroshima within history and defines the new possibilities that it has introduced to the world." Georges Bataille, "Concerning the Accounts Given by the Residents of Hiroshima," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, trans. Alan Keenan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 225. The introduction of abjection, the excess of nothingness, into trauma theory helps us accept that artistic representations of trauma should not paper over what makes an event truly traumatic. If fictionalized narratives of trauma function both as a product of the compulsion to repeat and as a process of working-through, then it stands to reason that these fictionalized narratives should attempt to reproduce the traumatic event through the complex interplay of both form and function.

> Human beings caught flush with their animality, wallowing in their vomit, as if to come closer to what is essential for Céline, beyond all "fancies": violence, blood and death. Never perhaps, not even with Bosch or the blackest aspect of Goya, have human "nature," or the other side of the "sensible," the "civilized human," or the divine been opened up with so much cruelty, and with so little satisfaction, illusion, or hope. This is the horror of hell without God: if no means of salvation, no optimism, not even a humanistic one, looms on the horizon, then the verdict is in, with no hope of pardon – the sportful verdict of scription.[903]

Torture is always inhuman because it is the happy acceptance of the torturer's animality and the active denial of the inherent rights of the tortured – abjection.

Ultimately, the psychotherapeutic potential of torture porn lies in its avowal of torture as abjection through its (re)presentation. Viñar argues that, "the most traumatic thing is not the actual trauma itself but the 'disavowal' of the traumatic event."[904] A program such as *24* writes off the event not as torture, but as acceptable political practice, while torture porn readily accepts that the event itself is, in fact, torture. Bearing witness and engaging the torture "is what locates the act of *true communication*, the act of avowal, within the register of persecution and victimization. Communication brings my most intimate subjectivity into being for the other; … avowal absolves from sin and, by the same stroke, founds the power of discourse."[905] For Kristeva, this avowal can be expressed through art. "This marginal potentiality of spoken sin as fortunate sin provides an anchorage for the art that will be found, resplendent, under all the cupolas. … On this peak of discourse, the power no longer belongs to the judge-God who preserves humanity from abjection … [but] to discourse itself, or rather to the act of judgment expressed in speech."[906] The confession alone is not enough, however; the wound must remain open for the opportunity of working-through to emerge. Rather than anesthetize torture or

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[903] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 147.
[904] Viñar, "Specificity of Torture," 318.
[905] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 129-130.
[906] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 131-132.

disavow torture as an event, the torture porn film accepts torture for what it is: abjected trauma.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although the focus of the American social body is no longer on the issue of torture, the political realities have not gone away. For example, in February of 2012, the United States resumed transferring detainees to Afghani detention facilities after NATO lifted its transfer moratorium that was imposed after the United Nations uncovered torture at 16 of the detention centers.[907] In August of 2012, the Center for Constitutional Rights condemned the United States after the Department of Justice closed an investigation (in which no charges were filed) of a CIA interrogation that resulted in two deaths.[908] And in May of 2013, a hunger strike at the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay drew public focus back to failed efforts to close the prison.[909] Although the torture porn cycle may have concluded, its cultural power continues to linger. In the fall of 2011, Universal Studios theme park in Hollywood opened a maze attraction based on the *Hostel* series that was designed by Eli Roth. In it, people are "able to recreate the feeling of utter panic one experiences following the realization that the Slovakian youth hostel where one had planned to get a cheap bed for the night is in fact the lair of women hired to seduce and drug tourists so they can be sold to torturers."[910] From a supposedly real company in Thailand, to a fictional story in the local multiplex, to a highly detailed simulation of torture, these experiences of abjection continue to circulate throughout the U. S. cultural

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[907] Alissa J. Rubin, "After a Reassessment, NATO Resumes Sending Detainees to Afghanistan Jails," *The New York Times*, February 16, 2012, A section, Final edition. LexisNexis.
[908] "Human Rights Group Denounces End of Torture Investigation," *Targeted News Service*, August 30, 2012. LexisNexis.
[909] "Obama Vows to Redouble Effort to Close Guantanamo," *Business Mirror*, May 6, 2013. LexisNexis.
[910] Ben Child, "Eli Roth to Design 'Hostel' Theme Park Attraction," *Guardian Unlimited*, July 29, 2011. LexisNexis.

experience. Hopefully, this project can help illuminate how these stories work to shape our personal and national identity and offer potential in working-through the traumatic impact of torture.

Although I answered the questions I sought to explore at the beginning of this project, I must confess that every answer seems to raise another question. For those who consume them, horror films can be used as psychotherapeutic tools, however, it also appears as though the working-through offered (by torture porn at least) acts to smooth out the contradictions of the nation-state. Does this mean that horror films are inherently limited by ideology or maybe even that they are part of the functioning of dominant ideology? Does this also suggest that working-through neutralizes the political potential of challenges to the system? Further, although horror can help mediate narrative dialectics in relation to identity, is there an even larger dimension to the rhetorical manifestations of fear? This project does not take up these questions, but I hope that it might act as a starting point to a continuing conversation that helps guide us toward a larger understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of horror.

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